

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TAINOS AND COLUMBUS FROM
1492 TO 1524 IN SPANISH DOCUMENTS OF THE TIME

by

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ABSTRACT

The Relationship between the Tainos and Columbus from 1492 to 1524 in Spanish Documents of the Time

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One of the most important events in the History of the World was the encounter between Christopher Columbus and the Tainos. This event has been described many times in many books and articles, however, most of them focus on Columbus. There is an abundance of primary sources that describe the encounter. One of the little known sources is the Spanish government documents of the time, *Documents of the Indies*. The originals of these documents remain housed in the Archivo General de las Indias (General Archives of the Indies) in Spain.

I read and analyzed 316 documents from the *Colección de Documentos Inéditos Relativos al Descubrimiento, Conquista y Organización de las Antiguas Posesiones Españolas de América y Oceanía* (most often abbreviated “CDIA”). I translated 244 segments from 56 of the 360 documents into English that contained information regarding the impact of the encounter on the Tainos people, the contributions they made to the colonization of Hispaniola, and the ineffectiveness of the Spanish Monarchy and its primary colonizer, Christopher Columbus from 1492 to 1524. I then presented the information in terms of how it compliments currently available historical information.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Summary of Categorization of CDIA Segments.....	6
2	Hispaniola population estimates between 1492 and 1547.....	13

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures		Page
1	Map of the Greater and Lesser Antilles.....	9
2	Map of six tribal regions on the island of Hispaniola	10
3	Map of six tribal regions on the island of Hispaniola.....	21

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Primary Sources Available Covering the Initial Encounter	1
Spanish Documents and the Tainos People	3
Procedures Used to Analyze Spanish Government Documents	4
Categorization of Translated Segments	
vi	
II. TAINOS BEFORE COLUMBUS (1200-1492)	
Tainos People.....	9
Tainos Government System	10
Tainos Society	11
Tainos Living Conditions	12
Tainos Population	xii
Tainos Weapons.....	xiv
Tainos Food	xiv
Tainos Gold.....	xv
Tainos Religion	xv
Summary.....	xv
i	
III. THE ENCOUNTER OF THE TAINOS WITH COLUMBUS AND THE SPANIARDS (1492-1500).....	19
The Three Voyages of Columbus	xviii
A Brief Summary of What We Know About.....	xviii
New Information from Spanish Government Documents	xix
Business Venture	20
Power and Privileges.....	xix

	xv
Colonization of the New World.....	xx
First Voyage of Christopher Columbus (1492-1493).....	xx
A Brief Summary of What We Know	xx
First Voyage Exploration.....	xx
Landing on Hispaniola and Meeting Guacanagari.....	xxi
The Demise of the Santa Maria	xxii
Second Voyage of Christopher Columbus (1493-1498).....	24
A Brief Summary of What We Know	xxiii
Second Voyage Exploration	xxiii
The Massacre of Columbus' Men.....	xxiv
Colonization Efforts Continue	xxv
Exploitation and Revenge	xxvi
New Information from Spanish Government Documents	xxvii
Economic Support.....	xxvii
Tainos Taken to Spain	xxvii
Conversion of the Tainos	xxviii
Spanish Army in Hispaniola	xxviii
Columbus' Fame in Spain.....	xxix
Second Voyage Departure	xxx
The Beginning of the Downfall of the Tainos	xxxi
A Brief Summary of What We Know	xxxi
Colonization Efforts.....	xxxi
Tainos Revolt.....	xxxii
New Information from Spanish Government Documents	xxxii
Cruelties in Hispaniola.....	xxxii
Lack of Gold in Hispaniola.....	xxxiii
Dominion Over the New World.....	xxxiii
Treatment of the Tainos	xxxv
Catholicism in the New World: Communication Issues.....	xxxvii
Failure of Colonization Efforts	xxxviii
Criminals Sent to Hispaniola	xxxviii

	xvi
Economic Interests in Hispaniola	xxxix
The Third Voyage - 1498.....	xxxii
A Brief Summary of What We Know	xli
Third Voyage Exploration	xli
Columbus' Administration.....	xli
Fray Ramon Pane's Eyewitness Account	xlii
The Fourth Voyage–1502	xlii
A Summary of What We Know	xlii
Summary	xliii
IV. GOVERNMENT AFTER COLUMBUS 1500-1509.....	46
Bobadilla's Brief Reign 1500-1501	xliv
A Brief Summary of What We Know	xliv
New Information from Spanish Government Documents	xlv
Transferring Authority to Ovando	xlv
Lack of Abundance of Gold.....	xlvi
Slavery Prohibition Ignored.....	xlvi
Ovando's Reign 1502-1509	xlix
A Brief Summary of What We Know	xlix
Bartolome de Las Casas.....	l
Ovando Evolves Repartimiento System into the Encomiendas System	li
Ovando's Atrocities Against the Tainos	li
New Information from Spanish Government Documents	lii
Treatment of Natives.....	lii
Construction of Indian Towns	liv
Slavery Prohibited Again.....	lv
Secret Document Regarding Building of Towns and Houses	lvi
Forced Labor Continues.....	lvii
La Casa de Contration: [House of Trade]	lviii

Summary	lviii
V. THE REIGN AND FALL OF DIEGO COLUMBUS 1509-1524.....	62
The Reign of Diego Columbus	lx
A Brief Summary of What We Know	lx
Dissolving the Encomiendas	lxi
Conflict Between Deigo and King Ferdinand.....	lxi
Laws of Burgos and the Dominican Priests.....	lxii
Cristobal Lebron Replaces Colon - 1515.....	lxii
Colon Returns to Power-1520.....	lxiii
Native Population.....	lxiv
New Information from Spanish Government Documents	lxiv
Transfer of Gold and Power to Columbus' Son, Diego.....	lxiv
Assimilation of the Natives.....	lxv
Conversion to Christianity	lxvi
Atrocities Against Tainos	lxvii
Treatment of the Tainos	lxviii
Work in the mines.	lxviii
Salaries of the natives..	lxix
Reports to the King.....	lxx
Population of Hispaniola.....	lxxi
Davila's Letter to the King of Spain Describing Problems	lxxi
Davila's Suggested Solutions	lxxiii
The New Queen of Spain's Solutions.....	lxxvii
A Letter to the King Charles V from the Geronmyte Priests.....	lxxxii
Second Letter from the Geronmytes	lxxxiii
Summary	lxxxviii
VI. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION.....	91
General Findings.....	lxxxix
The Contributions of the Tainos to the	lxxxix
Initial Settlement of Hispaniola	lxxxix
The Power, Position and Failures of Christopher Columbus	xc
Language and Communication Barriers	xc
Specific Findings	xc

The Ineffective Nature of the Spanish Monarchy xci

The Monarchy Sends A Small Army To Conqueror Hispaniola..... xci

The Monarchy's Position On Slavery xcii

Criminals Sent To Settle Hispaniola..... xcii

The Monarchy Created An Institution To Exploit Hispaniola..... xciii

Attempts to convert and assimilate the Tainos xciii

Discussion xciv

Suggestions for Future Research xcvi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Tainos were the first inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere to come into contact with the Europeans but have received little consideration for their role in the events relating to the occupation of the Americas. This paper examines the Tainos role in the encounter with Christopher Columbus and the impact the Spaniards' had on the Tainos. It adds information to the literature from a series of original Spanish government documents, not before translated into English.

Christopher Columbus, after exploring Cuba and other islands in the Caribbean, disembarked near what is now Cape Haiti (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) on the island of Hispaniola, in December of 1492. There he encountered a large, homogeneous group of people, the Tainos, living in permanent villages governed by local, district, and regional hereditary chiefs (Sauer, 1966; Morison, 1970; Floyd, 1973; Tyler, 1988; Wilson, 1990). The regional chief of the district of Marien, Guacanagari, welcomed Columbus and helped him save the cargo from his flagship vessel, the Santa Maria that floundered on the Cape Haiti reefs on the evening of December 24, 1492.

The focus of this paper is on the role of the Tainos in the encounter with Columbus and a set of previously un-translated Spanish government documents. The paper summarizes what is known about the encounter based on the work of past and current day historians as well integrating information taken directly from the Spanish government documents. The objective is to examine the impact of the encounter on the Tainos people, the contributions they made to the colonization of Hispaniola, and the

ineffectiveness of the Spanish Monarchy and its primary colonizer, Christopher Columbus.

Primary Sources Available Covering the Initial Encounter

Most of the primary sources about the encounter between the Tainos and the Europeans came from Columbus or those who worked under his command. Christopher Columbus kept a diary, which was lost sometime in the 1500s. Fortunately, Father Bartholome de Las Casas (Carolo, 1965), a priest who spent many years in Hispanola had abstracted the diary before it was lost and added his own observations (Fuson, 1997; Cohen 1969; Varela, 1999). Martín Fernández de Navarrete, a [Spanish sailor](#) and [historian](#) rediscovered [Las Casas'](#) abstract of the log [Christopher Columbus](#) made on his first voyage as well as other documents and published them in Madrid in seven volumes in, *Collección de Viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los Españoles desde fines del Siglo XV* (1825-1865); The first volume dealt primarily with Columbus. The American, Washington Irving spent many years in Spain as a U.S. diplomat and was invited to translate the work of Martín Fernández de Navarrete. Irving ended up publishing a three-volume biography of Columbus in 1928, *History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. The work was reprinted thirty-nine times in English and fifty-one editions were written in other languages before Irving's death in 1859. (Add [reference](#)). Supporting the information originally provided by Las Casas, scholars have

added many contemporary findings to the literature (Dobyns 1983; Rouse 1992; Keegan, 1992).

Several books and documents were published or re-published to commemorate the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. Most notable were those published by Dayson (1991), Herbert (1992), Morison (1970), Litvinioff (1991), and Wilson (1990.) These publications were thoroughly reviewed in preparation for this paper. A timeline of the main events on Hispanola from 1492 through 1524 is presented in Appendix A.

The focus of this paper is not a complete review of the facts and legends of Christopher Columbus. Based on the extensive literature available on him, there seems to be little chance of developing a consensus on Columbus and his accomplishments. Thus, the description of the life of Columbus included here is in no way exhaustive or definitive. The reader is referred to the many books and essays available on Columbus such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph as well as those described in, *Christopher Columbus: A Bibliographic Voyage* by Shreve (1991), as well as works by Le Beau (1992), Baatz (1992), Lopez (1992), and Vizenor (1992). The goal is to focus on the historical context of the culture of the Tainos people.

Spanish Documents and the Tainos People

In my search for primary sources that might shed additional light on the lives of the Tainos people, I analyzed copies of fifty-six official Spanish government documents that, although after conducting an extensive search, I was unable to find translated into English. These documents have been referred to by a few historians (add referenes) but

not used to the degree that seems worthy. This institutional history found in these documents provides rich detail of the Spanish government and the Tainos people, the fiscal system, the encomienda and the Roman Catholic Church of the time.

The Spanish government documents are part of an archive that was originally created in 1781 by the King of Spain, Carlos III. He decided to formally create the *Archivo General de las Indias* (AGI) [General Archive of the Indies] being highly influenced by his intellectual Secretary of the Indies, José de Gálvez. The purpose of the AGI was to collect in one site all the official and non official documents concerning the Spanish administration in the Americas and Philippines. The original documents cautiously preserved were to be used as source material for writing the history of Spanish presence in the Americas. The documents that are preserved in the AGI, can be best described as a bookcase that run more than 29,600 feet long (<http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/arnac/indias/>).

Three of the fifty-six Spanish government documents were especially relevant in understanding more about the Tainos people. Those documents included: (a) an official letter from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela describing their attempts to govern Hispaniola (1497); (b) an account along with recommendations provided by King Ferdinand's bookkeeper, Gil Gonzalez de Davila (1518); and (c) two letters from the Gerome Priest of Santo Domingo to the Emperor Carlos V. who succeeded King Ferdinand (1518). A list of the 56 documents including the titles, dates and page numbers is included in Appendix B. Current day Spanish and English translations of the key segments from all 56 documents are included in AppendixC.

I founded 316 government documents and analyzed 56 of the more relevant Castilian Spanish documents found in the, *Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos Relativos al Descubrimiento, Conquista y Organizacion de Americay Ocenia* (Madrid, 1864-1880's). These are copies of official Spanish government documents that have not, based on my literature search, been translated into English. These documents are commonly abbreviated as "CDIA." Most of the documents consisted of correspondence between the officials on the Island of Hispaniola and the King and Queen of Spain. A few authors such as Floyd (1973), Casas (1974) and Sauer (1966) have referenced the CDIA set but have chosen not to use them to the fullest. Floyd explained that the documents often made reference to letters from officials on the islands that are missing and thus it is difficult to know what was contained in the letters from the officials. However, I found that these documents contained many rich, untapped details that validate and vividly illustrate, expand, or add new information to our knowledge about the encounter and colonization of Hispaniola. This paper will briefly summarize the information currently available while integrating the new and expanded information from my review of the *CDIA* documents.

The complete collection of documents was difficult to locate. In 2002, I located the complete collection at the Oklahoma State University and spent several weeks in Oklahoma reviewing the documents. Since that time, Brigham Young University has also obtained most of the collection.

I read these documents, written in Castilian Spanish, a form of the Spanish language that was used during the 1500's, and translated the titles and main segments of each document first into Spanish and then into English. In total I translated the titles of

the fifty-six document and 206 segments that I deemed to be significant pieces of information. The titles of the documents and the number of segment(s) translated from each document are presented in Appendix B.

Categorization of Translated Segments

I analyzed each of the 206 segments in terms of how they contribute to the current knowledge base. I sorted each segment into one of four categories: (a) validates known information, (b) expands known information, (c) adds new information, or (d) conflicts with known information. The details of the sorting process are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Categorization of Segments

Category	Number of Segments
Validates Known Information	20
Expands Known Information	64
Adds New Information	122
Conflicts with Known Information	0
Total	206

Twenty of the segments served to validate known information, sixty-four of the segments expanded already known information, that is it added detail or provided the actual legal reference for the actions and events that took place. There were one hundred and twenty-two new segments that added new information to what we already know. For example, in Document #17, I found information about the authorized sale of Tainos slaves in Spain. This is important information because historians such as Floyd (1973), Phillips (1976) and Thomas (2000) often report that Queen Isabela did not agree with Columbus'

suggestion to sell Tainos slaves in Spain. However, in Document #17, Queen Isabela authorized the sale of Tainos slaves. (She later rescinded this authorization.)

Presentation of New Information

In Chapters 2-5, I briefly reviewed the currently available information on the history of the Tainos people on the island of Hispaniola and show how the new information integrates with that which is already known. Chapter 2, *Tainos Before Columbus, (1200-1492)*, describes what we know about the Tainos people before their encounter with Columbus. The initial encounter with Columbus and the Spaniards is described in Chapter 3, *The Encounter of the Tainos with Columbus and the Spaniards (1492-1500)*. Chapter 4, *The Post-Christopher Columbus Government, (1500-1509)* describes the government in Hispaniola after the fall of Christopher Columbus and a major effort on the part of the King and Queen of Spain to obtain as much gold as possible. Following the depletion of the gold, Chapter 5, *The Reign and Fall of Diego Colon (Columbus) (1509-1520)*, examines the period of time that Christopher Columbus' son, Diego Columbus governed Hispaniola. The last chapter, Chapter 6, summarizes and presents the major conclusions of this paper.

CHAPTER 2

TAINOS BEFORE COLUMBUS (1200-1492)

The best accounts of life among the Tainos come from the retrospective writings of Father Ramon Pane and Bartholome de Las Casas. Father Pane accompanied Columbus on his second voyage in 1493 and was commissioned by Columbus to study the Tainos religion. He was the first missionary to learn the Tainos language and after 4 years completed his *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* (Pane, 1571/1999). This was one of the first eyewitness accounts of the initial encounter between the Spaniards and the Tainos.

Bartholome de Las Casas, a close friend of the Columbus family, came to Hispaniola with Governor Nicholas de Ovando as an adventurer in 1502. As an *encomendero* [land and slave owner], Las Casas very closely observed the mistreatment of the Tainos people. Compelled and appalled by the situation, Las Casas turned Dominican priest, with the objective of converting the Tainos and at the same time protecting them. He later became known as the *Protector of the Indians*. Las Casas wrote several books including, *Historia de las Indias* [History of the Indies], that was finally published in 1563 (Tyler, 1988; Sauer, 1966; Floyd, 1973).

In addition to the writings of Pane and Las Casas, information for this chapter came from the acclaimed work of Irving Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (1992). Irving, an anthropologist and archaeologist spent his entire career studying the prehistory and ethnohistory of the West Indies. In his book he integrates the work of Pane, Las Casas, as well as many other contemporary authors.

The Tainos People

Archeologists and anthropologists report that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Tainos migrated along the great arc of islands that comprise the Lesser Antilles, and by the fifteenth century they occupied the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas (Rouse, 1992; Floyd, 1973; Wilson, 1990; Cassa, 1974). Figure 1 shows a map of the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Although there were Tainos throughout most of the West Indies, this work focuses specifically on those people who lived on the island of *Hispaniola*, what is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

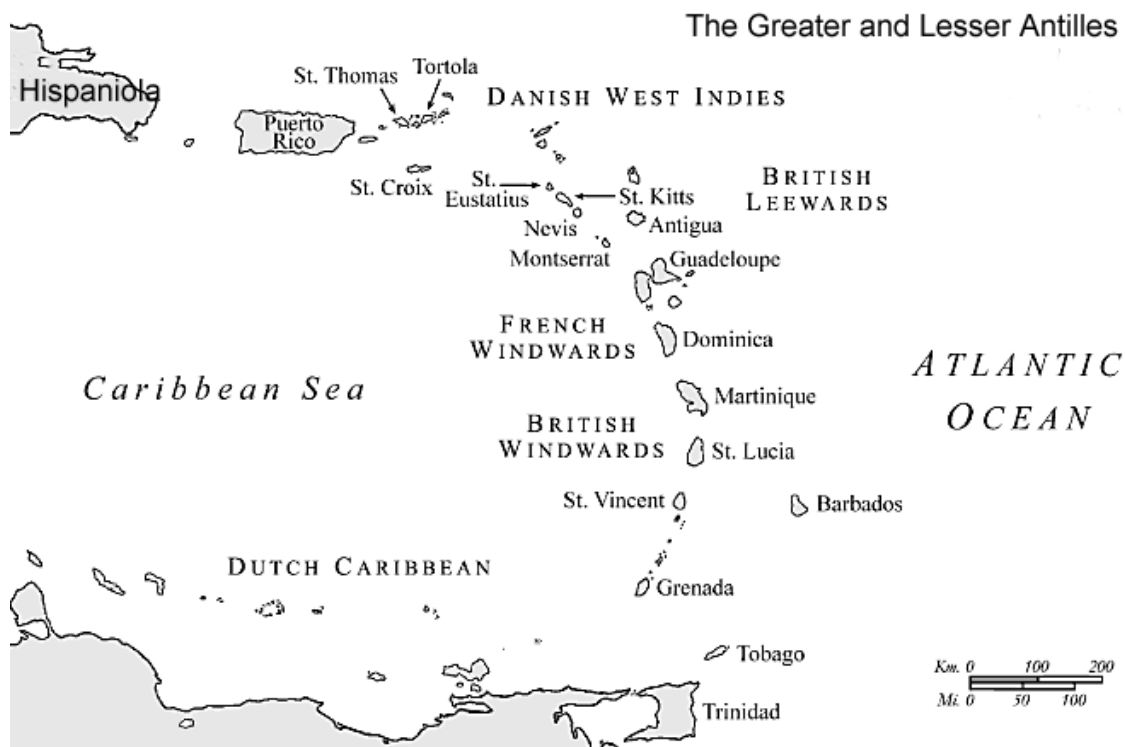


Figure 1. Map of the Greater and Lesser Antilles.

Tainos Government System

The Tainos were governed by local, district, and regional hereditary *caciques* [chiefs] (Tyler, 1998). The caciques “exercised absolute authority over the immediate tribe but their authority over the entire *cacicazgo* [tribal division] depended more on the individual cacique’s power to instill fear and enforce obedience” (Floyd, 1973 p. 14). There were 6 tribal division chiefs (both men and women could serve as chiefs): Figure 2 shows the 6 tribal divisions on the island of Hispaniola. The names of the chiefs are listed in lowercase type-face below the regions which are capitalized.

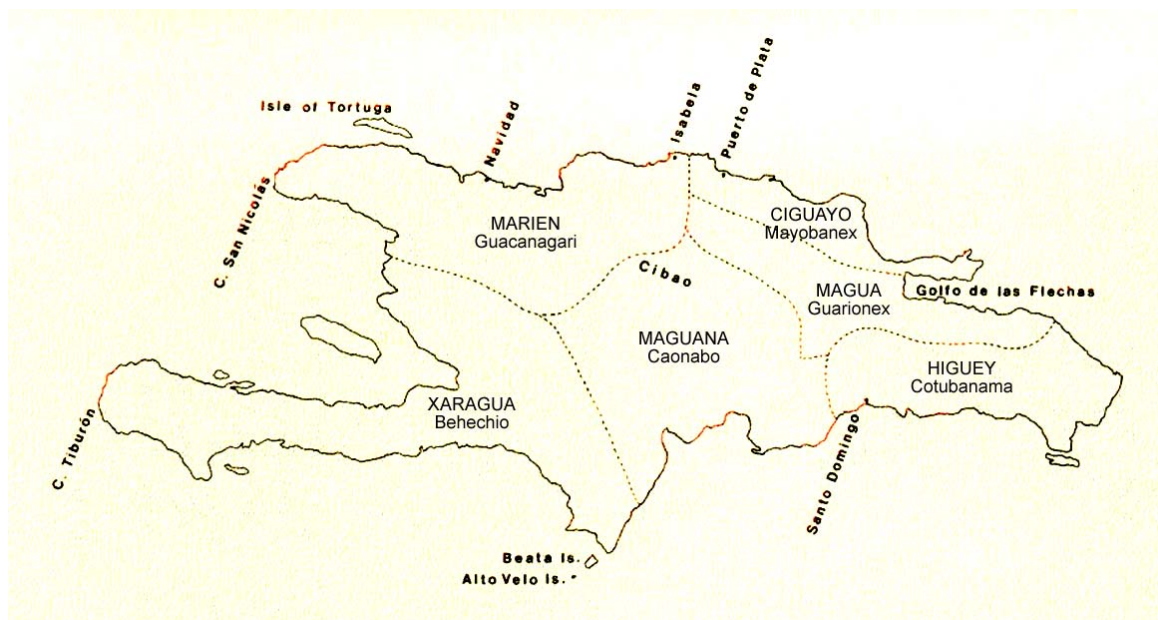


Figure 2. Map of 6 tribal regions on the island of Hispaniola.

Chief Mayobanex served in the northeast coastal region of Ciguayo; Guarionex served in the northeast inland region of Magua Higuayo served in the southeast region of Cotubanama; Caonabo served in the central region of Maguana; Behecchio served in the

southwest region of Xaragua; and Guacannagari served in the northwest region of Marien.

The tribal division chief of the district of Marien, Guacanagari, is the chief who welcomed Columbus and helped him save the cargo on his flagship vessel, the *Santa Maria*, when it floundered on reefs in the Cap Haitien Bay. Guacannagari was, as Columbus came to learn, one of the most docile of the Hispaniola caciques (Tyler, 1988).

Tainos Society

At the time of the encounter with the Spaniards, the Tainos culture was at a formative stage of development on the verge of civilization (Rouse, 1992). Tainos lived as large, homogeneous groups of people, in permanent villages containing on average one to two thousand people. Wilson (1990) reported that the word, “Tainos” means “noble.”

The Tainos society was a peaceful, matriarchal society and its people were humble, patient, intelligent, and alert. They had few possessions but had little desire to own worldly goods (Cassa, 1974; Tyler, 1988). They spoke a single language and marriage was arranged by the provision of service or payment for the brides. The Tainos practiced polygamy but only the chiefs could afford to have many wives. In addition to the cacique level, there were two classes of people: the *nitainos*, a directing class beneath the cacique level and the *naborias*, common laborers. There were no lower classes (Sauer, 1966)

Tainos Living Conditions

Tainos houses consisted of simple round wooden structures with thatched roofs and dirt floors with several related families living together in the same house. The chief's house was square and more elaborate. The houses were situated around a central plaza and the chief's house was located on the plaza. Tainos people were generally naked, very clean, and slept on mats or *hamacas* [hammocks] (Paiewonsky, 1991).

Tainos Population

Bartolome de Las Casas estimated that at the time of the Tainos encounter with the Spaniards, there were more than 3 million people on the island of Hispaniola. Other chroniclers reported that there were between 100,000 to 1,000,000 inhabitants (Thornton, 1987; Keegan, 1992; Denevan, 1976). Table 2 lists population estimates made by chroniclers between the years of 1492 and 1547.

Table 2

Hispaniola population estimates between 1492 and 1547

Date	Source	Population Estimate
1492	Bartholomew de Las Casas, <i>Brevesima Relación de la Destrucción de Las Indias</i>	3,000,000

Table 2 (continued). Hispaniola population estimates between 1492 and 1547

Date	Source	Population Estimate
1492	Carta que escribió el Licenciado Alonso de Zuazo en Enero 22 de 1518	1,130,000
1492	Pedro Martir de Angleria, Op. Cit, Decadas, III, Libro VII	1,200,000
1495- 97	Bartholomew Columbus, "Cartas que escribieron varios Padres de la Orden de Santo Domingo, residents en la Isla Española a Mr. Xevres el 4 de Junio de 1518 CDII, tomo VII	1,000,000
1495- 97	A Dominican Priest, Cartas que escribieron varios Padres de la Orden de Santo Domingo, residents en la Isla Española a Mr. Xevres el 4 de Junio de 1518 CDII, tomo VII	600,000
1508	Census under Pasamontes, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Historia, Libro II, capítulo XLI y XLII	60,000
1510- 11	Census and Encomiendas under Diego Columbus, Antecedentes Relativos al viaje de los Gerónimos como gobernadores de las Española, CDII, tomo VII	33,528
1512	A Dominican Priest in Castilla, Carta de Relación escrita por los religiosos de Santo Domingo en Diciembre 4, 1519, CDI, tomo	40,000

XXXV

1514	Relation of the Alburquerque Repartimientos, Repartimiento de la Isla Española en 1514, Ed. Rodrigo Demorizi, Los Dominicoa y las Encomiendas	25,435
1518	Licenciado Zuazo and Geromytes Priest, Carta de los padres Geronimos al Rey Don Carlos el 18 de Enero de 1518	11,000
1529	Sebastian Ramirez de Fuenleal, Carta de Ramirez de Fuenlea el 18 de Julio de 1529	2,340
1547	Dr. Montaña Protector of the Indians, Carta del Dr. Montaña el 25 de Julio de 1547	150

Tainos Weapons

The Tainos had two weapons that they put to good use in conjunction with deception: fire and the pliable *bejuco* cane used as a cord for strangulation.

Unfortunately, the Spaniards were their equals at deception but had far superior weapons (Cassa, 1974).

Tainos Food

The main source of life of the Tainos was founded in a strong agriculture base. The main food of the Tainos was *cassava* root [Tainos: *casaba*], because of its high yield and ability to be stored for long periods of time. Root crops were grown in raised beds or

mounded fields that were called *conuco*. The mounds as reported by Rouse (1992) were three feet high and approximately nine feet in circumference and were used to help retard erosion and improve drainage. In the southern part of Hispaniola that has a drier climate, Tainos reportedly constructed extensive irrigation systems.

Other food crops they raised included sweet potatoes, beans, squash, peanuts, guava, mamey [a fruit], and pineapple. In addition, they fished and hunted to obtain protein to supplement their diets. The Tainos also produced rubber for use in rubber-ball games and tobacco for their religious ceremonies (Deive, 1995; Cassa, 1974).

Tainos Gold

The Tainos mined nuggets of gold and use them to make ornaments and inlaid wooden objects. The gold nuggets were beaten into small plates rather than being melted and cast (Rouse, 1992)

Tainos Religion

The Tainos religion focused on the worship of deities known as “*zemis*.” The term *zemi* referred not only to the deities themselves but also to idols and fetishes representing them. The idols and fetishes were made from the remains of the bones of their ancestors or from wood, stone, other bone, shell, or pottery. See Figure 3 for an illustration of Tainos *zemis*.

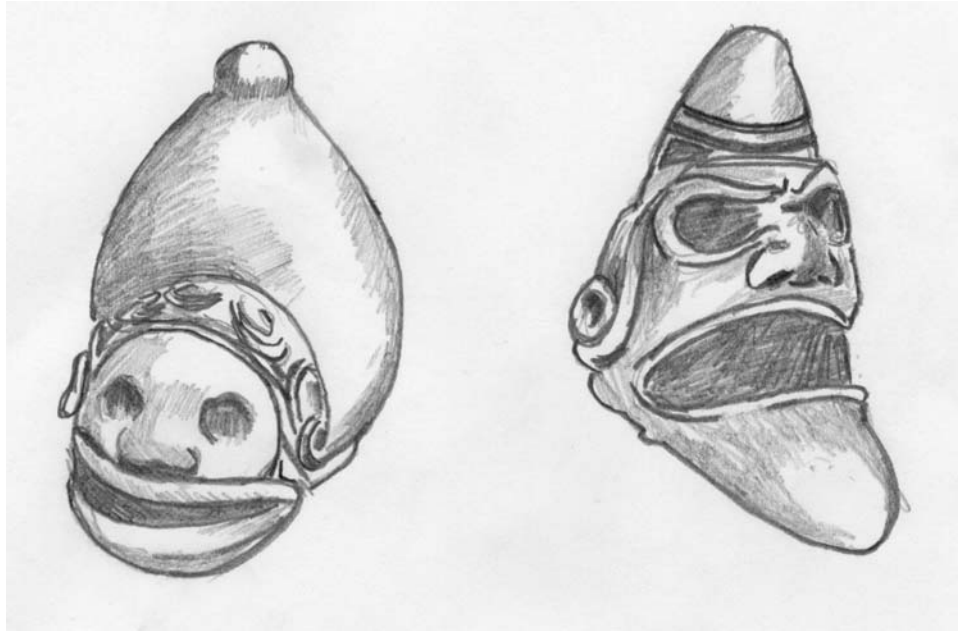


Figure 3. Illustration of Tainos zemis.¹

¹ Antonio A. Arce, illustrator

People owned as many as ten zemis and kept them in niches or on tables in their homes. The Tainos also had *bohuti* [shaman] who worked in the presences of priests to cure the sick. The chief's house was also considered his temple. The Tainos believed that the zemis had the power to ward off evil (Pane, 1571/1999).

Summary

This chapter described what we know about the culture of the Tainos people before their encounter with Columbus based on the accounts of retrospective writers of the time as well as archeologists and anthropologists. The next chapter describes the initial encounter with Columbus and the Spaniards (1492-1500).

CHAPTER 3

THE ENCOUNTER OF THE TAINOS WITH COLUMBUS
AND THE SPANIARDS (1492-1500)

This chapter describes the encounter between the Tainos and Columbus. The Spanish government documents, not previously translated, provide rich details about Columbus, and his second voyage and include information about the downfall of the Tainos. For continuity and to place the information from the Spanish government documents in context, this chapter begins with a brief summary of what we currently know about each of the three voyages of Columbus.

The Authorization for Columbus' Voyages

A Brief Summary of What We Know

Christopher Columbus was well prepared to sail to the Americas. He lived among Portuguese navigators, studied the accounts of previous mariners, and sailed on Portuguese voyages to Iceland, in the North Atlantic, West Africa, and the South Atlantic (Morison, 1942; Rouse, 1992). He thought it would be possible to reach China and Indonesia by traveling west across the Atlantic Ocean.

When the Portuguese refused to support his explorations he convinced Queen Isabela and King Ferdinand of Spain that his explorations would help Spain overcome the Portuguese lead in the race to exploit the riches of Asia. Not only did Columbus wish to help Spain but he wanted to realize benefit for himself and thus he insisted that in addition to financial incentives, he and his family receive title to any land that he colonized (Catz, 1993; Ife, 1993; Irving, 1981; Carras and McNeill, 1992; Keegan, 1992).

Figure 4 shows an illustration of the perceived likeness of Christopher Columbus although no actual pictures of him exist.

New Information from Spanish Government Documents

Business Venture

That Columbus' venture from the beginning was business in nature is validated and illustrated in a document written by the King and Queen of Spain on April 17, 1492, "if there is profit from the ships I send I will get two thirds and the Admiral will receive one-third" (Appendix A, CDIA #30, p. 56). On April 30 1492, 4 months before he left Spain on the first voyage, Columbus received the title of "Admiral, Viceroy, and Governor of the Islands and Lands that he discovered" (Appendix A, CDIA #30, p. 59).

Power and Privileges

Columbus also received a great deal of power in the, *Document of Confirmation* dated April 30, 1492 (CDIA # 30). He received, "power to condemn and punish the delinquents" (p. 111), [power over] what he conquered and gained,... (p. 112), and the perpetuity of the new land. His inhabitants were going to be "subjects," declaring the perpetuity of the documents with this phrase, "the ones who are alive today and their descendents" (p. 112).

Columbus received the power to transfer his privileges to his descendents, as stated in CDIA #30, "You can pass down your titles and positions to your children and the descendents of your children and your successors" (p. 115). These privileges were to be, "for now and forever" for Columbus and his descendents, even the titles of "Admiral

of the Ocean, Viceroy and Governor over the Island and firm Land that you discover and will discover from now on” (p. 116).

The fact that Columbus was persistent was illustrated in the documents and agreements that the King and Queen wrote before his first trip, “You begged and asked us for the confirmation of our letter that is enclosed. You can pass down your titles and position to your children and the descendents of your children and your successors” (p. 114). This CDIA documents helped to confirm the economic interest Columbus had in exploring the New World.

Colonization of the New World

The documents written in April of 1492 by the King and Queen of Spain giving profit and power to Christopher Columbus became in later years, a nemesis for them. For example, after Columbus’ first trip, a declaration included in CDIA #30 sealed the destiny of the people whom he later encountered, “We command all the neighbors and inhabitants and other persons that are living on the islands to obey you as Viceroy and Governor of them. And those who travel the seas we command that they obey you as Admiral of the Sea. They all must comply with your letters and commandments and must join with you and your officials to execute your justice. They must give you all the favors and help that you ask of them and accept the punishments that you impose” (p. 118).

First Voyage of Christopher Columbus (1492-1493)

A Brief Summary of What We Know

First Voyage Exploration

Columbus left Palos, Spain on August 3, 1492 and sailed to the Canary Islands (a Spanish possession off the coast of Morocco, Africa) with his fleet of three ships, the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the flagship vessel, the *Santa Maria*. After obtaining additional provisions, he left the Canary Islands on September 5, 1492 and landed in Guanahani (San Salvador) on October 12, 1492 (Morison, 1970; Dor-Net, 1991; Dyson, 1991). See the map in Figure 5 illustrating the path of Columbus' first trip.

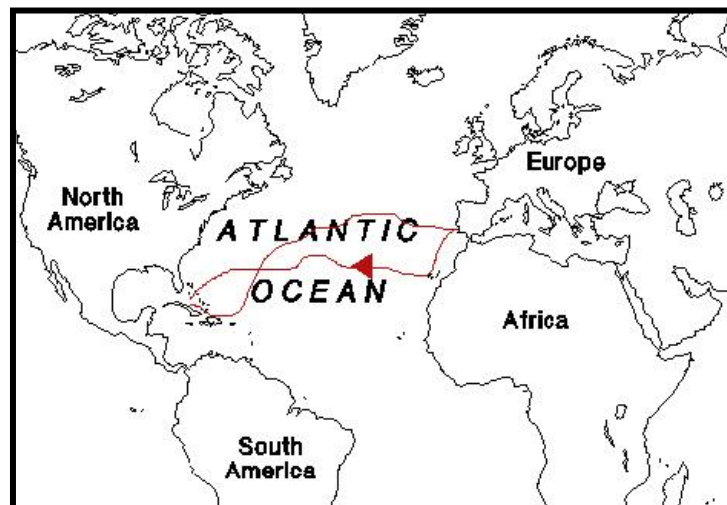


Figure 5. Map of Columbus' first trip.¹

¹ Antonio A. Arce, illustrator

He took six Tainos Indians with him from San Salvador to train and use them as interpreters. In search of gold and directed by the San Salvador Indians, Columbus made a fruitless trip to Cuba and then made his way to Hispaniola (Morison, 1970).

Landing on Hispaniola and Meeting Guacanagari

Martin Alonzo Pinzon, became impatient with Columbus in San Salvador and took off ahead of him with the *Pinta*. He went to the Central part of the northern coast of Hispaniola where he found and bartered for a substantial amount of gold in the Cibao

Valley. After finding the gold field, he traveled westward searching for Columbus (Morison, 1970; Varela, 1999; Fuson 1987).

Columbus landed on December 5, 1492 near what is now Cap Haitien [Cape Haiti] and was met by *Guacanagari* the chief of the Tainos from Marien region and an unusually large number of Tainos Indians. Columbus and his crew offered to barter beads and other goods and tried to assure the Indians through their interpreters that they meant no harm. The chief warmly welcomed Columbus and his crew and gave them gold ornaments. Columbus learned from Guacanagari that the main source of gold was farther east in the Cibao Valley, which was under the domain of another cacique [chief] named, Caonabo. Columbus then made plans to continue eastward toward the Cibao Valley (Morison, 1970; Varela, 2000; Cohen, 1969).

The Demise of the Santa Maria

During the night of December 24th, while the sailors were recuperating after a day of heavy Christmas partying, the flagship Santa Maria, under the negligent watch of a young boy, came up on a coral reef and became irreversibly stuck and suffered irreparable damage. Guacanagari and his villagers helped Columbus save the supplies from the sinking ship and stored them in their huts (Morison, 1970; Dyson, 1991; Cassa, 1974; Keen, 1959).

Columbus built a fort, partly out timbers salvaged from the Santa Maria, to house the men he couldn't fit on the Nina. He called the fort, *La Navidad*. He made plans to return to Spain taking the Indian interpreters with him but leaving part of his crew in the care of Guacanagari. Columbus was anxious to get back to Spain because he had been gone for five months and even more he was afraid that Pinzon was going to get back with

the report to the King and Queen of finding gold before he did. Traveling along the northern coast of Hispaniola, Columbus met up again with Pinzon and they raced back to Palos Spain arriving on the same day, March 15, 1493, even though they were separated by a storm during the journey. One of the Indian interpreters stayed with the King and Queen but died two years later. The rest of the Indian interpreters went back to the West Indies on Columbus's second voyage (Cassa, 1974; Varela, 2000; Dor-Net, 1991).

Second Voyage of Christopher Columbus 1493-1498

A Brief Summary of What We Know

Second Voyage Exploration

Columbus left Cadiz Spain on September 15, 1493 and again sailed to the Canary Islands for re-provisioning and to take on farm animals before proceeding to Hispaniola. Based on advice of the Indians, Columbus headed on a more southerly route and thus he discovered the best route to the West Indies (Morison 1970; Dyson, 1991; Dor-Net, 1991).

The purpose of the second voyage of Columbus was to: (a) rescue the sailors he had left behind at La Navidad, (b) explore the islands in the Greater Antilles, and (c) establish a colony on Hispaniola. The King and Queen of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabela, instructed him to, establish goldmines, install the settlers, develop trade with the Tainos, and convert the Tainos to Christianity (Floyd, 1973).

The King and Queen supplied Columbus well for his second voyage including 17 ships, "abundant" supplies, about 1,500 men (although no women), a doctor, a

mapmaker, and several clerics, among them Father Ramon Pane who Columbus brought along to study the Tainos religion (Morison, 1970; Dyson, 1991; Keen 1959).

The Massacre of Columbus' Men

After exploring the islands in the Greater Antilles, Columbus returned to La Navidad on November 18, 1493 and found the fort in ruins and all his men dead. Guancanagari explained that the men had been massacred by Caonabo, head of the chiefdom of Maguana, because the Spaniards had mistreated his subjects especially the women (Sauer, 1966).

Floyd (1973) reported that, "The Indians of the Marien cacicazgo [Guancanagari's region] probably did kill the Spaniards or most of them, seems fairly certain for the cacicazgo [region] extended to the lower Yaque river where the first two bodies were found. Moreover when the Spaniards later crossed the Yaque into the Cibao the Indians there showed no signs of ever having seen Europeans before. This would have made it quite improbable that Caonabo had led an expedition to La Navidad, for some of these Indians would certainly have accompanied the cacique" (p. 22). However, Ferdinand Columbus, Christopher Columbus's illegitimate son, in his biography, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by his Son Ferdinand* (1571), reported that after the capture of Caonabo in March of 1495, Caonabo confessed that he had "killed twenty Spaniards at La Navidad" because of the abuse of the Spaniards (F. Columbus, 1571/1959 p. 149). See Figure 6 for an illustration of Chief Caonabo after his capture.



Figure 6. Illustration of Chief Caonabo after his capture.¹

¹ Antonio A. Arce, illustrator

Colonization Efforts Continue

From January to April, 1494 Columbus built a town on the Dominican coast near the Cibao goldfield and named it *Isabela* after the Queen. Columbus was especially worried about another attack by Caonabo. Thus, he also constructed a fort inland to protect the colonizers that he called, *Santo Tomas*. After building the town and fort, he sent the colonizers out to search for gold nuggets in the river sands (Sauer, 1996; Floyd, 1973).

Columbus resumed his exploration of the Greater Antilles with the *Nina* and two smaller vessels on April 4, 1494. Diego Columbus, Christopher Columbus's son, took charge of the *Isabela* colony. After five months of unsuccessful attempts to find more

gold, Christopher Columbus returned to Isabela via the southern coasts of Jamaica and Hispaniola (Morison, 1970).

Exploitation and Revenge

During his absence, the colonizers began to exploit the local Tainos, stealing their possessions and raping the women much like they had supposedly done at La Navidad. The Tainos retaliated by destroying their own villages and fields and retreating into the forests. Columbus sent Alonzo de Ojeda, one of his men, to visit with Caonabo and forestall a rebellion. Ojeda lured Caonabo from his town, captured him, and Columbus shipped him off to Spain in March of 1495 (F. Columbus, 1571/1959; Sauer, 1966).

It was also during this time that Columbus ordered Father Ramon Pane to move to the Magua region under the care of Guarionex to complete his study of the Tainos religion. He wrote a book called the *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* (1571/1959). The Spaniards detested the Taino religion that involved the worship of *zemis* [idols and fetishes] and thus burned hundreds of them.

During the fall and spring of 1495, Columbus devoted most of his attention the colonization effort. Unfortunately, he was a better explorer than he was an administrator. Things did not go well for Columbus: the goldfield yielded less gold than had been anticipated, the seed crops they had brought from Spain failed to grow in the topic environment, and thus the colonizers had to consume their livestock because the food sources were insufficient. As a result, a year-long famine hit the island from 1495 to 1496 (Tyler, 1988; Cook, 2002). Even though the King and Queen of Spain sent additional supplies for the colonizers sadly, many of the Tainos people simply perished

In the spring of 1495, Guacanagari helped Columbus put down a revolt led by a coalition of local chiefs that included Caonabo's brothers. They killed the opposing chiefs and captured a number of their followers. When the King and Queen complained about the lack of income and prosperity of the colony, Columbus responded by sending them a shipload of these captives to be sold as slaves (Thorton, 1987; Paiewonsky, 1991; Koning, 1976).

New Information from Spanish Government Documents

Economic Support

CDIA #30 validates and expands the information about the amount of money Columbus received after his first trip when he arrived in Spain on May 15, 1493. The King and Queen of Spain paid Christopher Columbus a great deal of money and gave him the land titles as was previously agreed. On May 24, 1493, the King and Queen wrote, "We command that from the *maravedis* [money] that Admiral Christopher Columbus be given and paid a thousand *doblas* in gold (three hundred thousand seventy maravedis)"(p.93). We can estimate the value of the money if we compare the cost of a "good horse" at that time was 1,000 maravedis (p. 170).

Tainos Taken to Spain

With regard to the six natives that Columbus took with him to Spain (probably the ones he took by force from San Salvador), we learn more about what happened to the natives, "In regard to the Indians that Columbus brought back on the first trip, it is our will that you leave some of them and give them to Mr. Juan de Fonseca [minister for the Indies] ...They are going to be well treated and they will be pleased to be here as is the one that is living with us (p. 193).

Columbus adopted one of the natives who learned Spanish and took him back with him on his second trip as an interpreter. Columbus gave this native the “Christian name,” Diego Colon. This native as well as the other natives, were to learn about Catholicism and become Christian.

Conversion of the Tainos

In a document of instructions dated May 29, 1493 (CDIA #30), given to Columbus before his second trip, we learn more about the commitment to conversion held by the King and Queen “we knew that the natives [Tainos] were ready to be converted to the Holy Catholic Faith because they did not have any laws or anything. And this has greatly pleased the King and Queen. [Columbus was told to look] for all the ways and manners that he could procure and work to bring the inhabitants of the islands so that they could be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith” (p. 146).

A further instruction from the King and Queen read, “In consequence because of the ability and industries of the Indians that came here [to Spain], they will know and understand most of our language so try to teach them as much as you can about our Holy Faith. Treat the Indians well and treat them with love. Do not be upset with them. Have a lot of conversations and create familiarity with them. Do your best with them. In doing so, the Admiral can give them some gifts from the cargo and mercantiles from your Highness” (p 147).

Spanish Army in Hispaniola

A little know fact is that the preparation for the second trip started almost immediately after Columbus arrived in Spain following the first trip on May 19, 1493. The CDIA #30 document written on May 23, 1493, nine days later stated, “We [the King

and Queen of Spain] command a special army be built to go to the Indies and this army is to take weapons, cargo, provisions, people, artillery, officials, and other things that for said army that are needed. We give the charge to Mr. Christopher Columbus” (p. 65).

Why did the King and Queen organize an army for Columbus to take back with him on the second trip? One hypothesis was suggested by a statement that Columbus made in his diary when he said that, “with 50 men I can conquer all this nation” (Fuson, 1987; Varela, 2000). Later in the government document we read that some of the preparation included, “fifty pairs of *coraza* [breast plates], 50 *espigardas* [bayonets], and 50 *ballestas* [gun that throws arrows], and to take knowledge of the weapons that were given and will be given...” (CDIA # 30, p. 71).

Business enterprise was the clearly the main reason for going to the Americas and this was again validated by a letter the King and Queen of Spain wrote to Juan de Fonseca, [government official] who was to provide support for Columbus’ second trip, “we saw your letter and we believe in this business of the Army... As you know we charged you to please the Admiral of the Indies and his business and in his manner of doing business because the Army is under his command” (p. 206).

Columbus’ Fame in Spain

Columbus was instantly famous after his return to Spain. This was validated and illustrated by the official letter notifying Mr. Juan de Fonseca [minister for the Indies] about the state of the [official letter] business with the King of Portugal, imploring him to assist with the quick departure of the Admiral (written on September 5 of 1493). The King and Queen instructed Fonseca to, “consult with the King of Portugal about the

business [trip to the Indies]. As you see by the letter, the more we talk about this business we know how great the service [discovery of the Americas] that the Admiral provided us” (p. 216).

In spite of his fame, Columbus experienced many difficulties very soon after he returned to Spain. For example, Columbus apparently was not very welcomed by some of the courtesans [wealthy people who associated with the King and Queen of the King and Queen of Spain]. One of the documents illustrated the situation, “Regarding Juan of Soria, tell him about the order to please the Admiral that there be no contradictions with him because if this happens, we will be upset” (p. 208).

Second Voyage Departure

Columbus seemed to ignore the concerns of the King and Queen of Spain, who asked him to leave Spain with the expedition “as soon as possible” and this aspect in historian’s accounts is omitted. The King and Queen informed Columbus about their concerns with the expedition, “Let us know about the things that are happening there... And regarding your departure, we would like you not to delay any more than the 15th of this month of August” (p. 202). Three letters were written asking Columbus to hasten his departure, the second one was written on August 18, 1493, the last one written on September 5, 1493, eighteen days after the first letter. In this letter, the King and Queen stated again, “in our service, do not stay one more hour, but depart immediately (p .212), because “any delay in the departure was going to be considered a non service” to them (pp. 217). Columbus did not depart until September 15, 1493, almost a month after the King and Queen asked Columbus to depart “as soon as possible” and as a service to them.

The Beginning of the Downfall of the Tainos

A Brief Summary of What We Know

Colonization Efforts

In the spring of 1495, Columbus built a fort at *Concepcion de la Vega* close to the head of the chiefdom of Magua, Guarionex. The fort was located east of the gold field and was created to keep Guarionex under control. Columbus also imposed a tribute or tax system upon all the surviving chiefs in the Cibao Valley. The demands of the tribute system was extremely harsh on the Tainos and required far more than they could ever deliver in terms of gold and other products.

On April 20, 1496, Columbus left to go back to Spain to answer the King and Queen's complaints about his administration of the colonization effort. He left his brother, Bartholomew Columbus in charge. Columbus arrived in Cadiz, Spain on June 11, 1496 (Del Valle, 1946; Floyd, 1973; F. Columbus 1571/1959).

While Christopher Columbus was in Spain, his brother Bartholomew governed the colony. Bartholomew developed a second goldfield in the south-central part of the island and moved the capital from Isabela on the northern coast, to *Santo Domingo* on the southern coast to be closer to the second goldfield. When he ordered the abandonment of Isabela, in the fall of the 1497, the mayor Francico Roldan objected and attempted to take control of the northern goldfield. Unsuccessful, Roldan and his followers fled across the central mountains and took refuge with Behecchio head of the chiefdom of Xaragua. Roldan would prove to be Columbus's greatest nemesis (Wilson, 1990).

Bartholomew Columbus had visited Behecchio earlier in the year of 1497 and at that time, Behecchio and his sister, Anacaona, widow of Caonabo agreed to submit to the

tribute system. When they later accepted Francico Roldan and his followers, they used the event as an excuse to refute the tribute system (Paiewonsky, 1991).

Tainos Revolt

Shortly after the establishment of Santo Domingo as the capital, a coalition of fourteen chiefs, including Guarionex of Magua attempted to take over the fort at Concepcion de la Vega. Bartholomew Columbus successfully defeated them in a surprise nighttime attack. When they promised to follow Spanish rule, he released Guarionex and the other survivors. Guarionex took refuge with Mayobanex in the Ciguayo region in the mountains northeast of Cibao Valley. When Mayobanex refused to return Guarionex and the rest of the refugees to Bartholomew, Bartholomew captured and imprisoned both of the leaders. They later died of natural causes while in Spanish custody (Sauer, 1966; Tyler 1988). Subsequently, many local Indians were pressed into service in the goldfields.

New Information from Spanish Government Documents

Cruelties in Hispaniola

Based on the instructions that the Admiral [Christopher Columbus] gave to Mosen Pedro of Margarite [subordinate of Columbus] to recognize the provinces of the Island of Cuba, April 9 of 1494 (CDIA #38), we learn of other characteristics of Columbus' personality not well known or described by historians. For example, Columbus dealt harshly with Tainos people who stole. Columbus instructed his men, "If you find that some of them [Indians] steal from, you should punish them by cutting their noses and ears because they are members that cannot be hidden. Because with this you

will you assure that the entire island knows that this happened because they stole; the good Indians I command they be treated well and the bad be punished” (p. 251).

In the same document, Columbus instructed de Margarite on how to capture Caonabo, the trouble-causing Taino chief. Columbus instructions said, “You should win his trust until the said Caonabo is assured and is without fear that you are going to do something to him. After that, you should capture him in the way that you believe is the best” (p. 251-252). In other words, capture the Indian chief by deception. Pedro de Margarite became legendary after the capture of Caonabo, however, very few know the real facts regarding the capture of the legendary Taino Indian Chief, Caonabo.

Lack of Gold in Hispaniola

The King and Queen, on June 7, 1494 showed their concern about the lack of gold being produced and monitored in Hispaniola. As a consequence of their concern, they selected one of their courtesans, Bernal Diaz de Pisa as the Accountant of the Army. The instruction given to Pisa in CDIA #30 contained eight points none of which mentioned the Tainos people. The document commanded, “you should keep an account and an explanation of all the gold and other mercantile that that is produced there [Hispanola] and that which is brought here. You should keep a different book of the things that are brought to Spain (CDIA #30, p. 224). They further instructed, “about the gold and other mercantile and produce that will be loaded—nobody should load or unload any mercantile without your order and specific directions” (p. 226). And, “if you find any ship that has concealed mercantile that was not declared, the Admiral should embargo the products and register them with you” (p. 226).

Dominion Over the New World

Two of the most important documents that were signed in Spain include the *Capitulaciones* [Contract document] *between the King and Queen of Spain and King of Portugal, about the right to navigate* [travel] *for both crowns...* signed on July 7, 1494, and the *Capitulacion* [Contract document] *among the Catholic crown [Spain] and Portugal, about the division of the Sea/Ocean September 5 of 1494*. The first document is a 30 page document with a great deal of information about the rights the King and Queen had over the Americas, the second document contains 27 pages, where the King and Queen of Spain and the King of Portugal, divide the sea and the land beyond the already established boundaries. Nothing is said about the Tainos.

Another document that is of high interest focused on the Portuguese and Spaniards going to the Indies. The King and Queen, on April 10, 1495 wrote a *Real provision* [document] *providing instructions to everyone who would like to go to the Indies and establish there*. It also focused *on those who desired to go and discover new lands*. In this document, Spain established some of the regulations for those going to “explore” the Americas. It read, “because we know that persons and neighboring inhabitants in some cities, villages and places, and ports of our kingdoms and *señorios*, our subjects and natives [citizens of Spain] would like to go to discover other islands and firm land that are a part of the Indias [Indies]” (CDIA # 30, p. 317). The reason for going was, “to do business on the island to look for metals and other *mercaderias* [mercantiles] and at the same time for those who just want to and live and establish themselves on the island Hispaniola” (p. 318).

The King and Queen, referring to these explorers said: “they should depart only from the city of Cadiz, and of no other place” (p. 319). The possibilities of going to the

Indies was indiscriminate, “about any person that would like to establish in Hispaniola without salary, they can go freely as long as they are honest...they won’t pay any rights [cost to live on Hispanola].

New immigrants were able to, “own properties for themselves and their descendants. . . .The houses that they build and the land that they work and the places where they crop” (p. 319). They were not expected to pay taxes, and most important, they became business partners with the King and Queen as were the explorers. “They can keep one third of the gold that they find and collect from the Island. The two- thirds will be for us” (p. 320). “Regarding anything else they find on the island they should give ten percent tithing to us or to those in power to receive it. This applies to everything but gold which they should give us two thirds of. They can buy anything from the Christians that are there or will be there-- any mercantile as long as it is not gold” (p. 320-321).

Treatment of the Tainos

The Spanish interest in Hispaniola quickly decreased, the abundant gold was not found, Spaniards who accompanied Columbus started to rebel against the regime, and Columbus started to feel the failure of his enterprise. As indicated, after capturing some natives from a “war” in Hispaniola, he sent the prisoners to Spain to be sold as slaves.

Historians reported that Queen Isabela never agreed with Columbus, on the treatment of the Tainos slaves (Paiewonsky, 1991; Barreiro, 1993; Thomas, 2000). CDIA #30 reveals that this is only partially true. In the beginning, the Queen totally agreed with Columbus about selling Tainos slaves in Spain. In CDIA # 30, we find information that discredits the Queen of Spain. On April 12, 1495, *Cedula* [document] *notifying the Bishop of Badaxoz, that the Indians that are coming on the ships should be*

sold in Andalucia, and that Bernal de Pisa quickly departs to the Indies says,

“Regarding what you wrote about the Indians that are coming on the ships, we think they should be best sold in Andalucia than in another place, you should sell them as you think best” (p. 332). The document is signed by the Queen and her husband, the King of Spain. I could find no explanation for why the Queen, in a document sent one day later on April 13 1493, retracted her decision. Perhaps, some of her counselors or maybe a priest of the Crown, changed her mind about selling the Indians as slaves. In the second letter she wrote, “With regard to our other letters about selling the Indians sent by Christopher Columbus, we would like to consult with experts, theologians, and canon lawyers [people who know the Bible well] to determine if with good conscience they can be sold by you or by us. We cannot do this until we see the letters sent by the Admiral to know the reasons the Indians were sent” (p. 331-332). However, the Crown added in the same document, “In consequence, please hold the money for those who were already sold for the short term until we know if we can continue to sell the Indians. Those who already bought Indians should *not* know this” (p. 336). This information suggests that the King and Queen of Spain, were not truly and fully engaged in the protection of the native people that Columbus brought back from Hispaniola.

In later years, it appears that natives were still brought to Spain, to be sold as slaves. In a document written on June 20, 1500 (CDIA #38), *Document commanding that the Indians that were brought from the island and were sold by command of the Admiral should be set free and sent back to the country where they came from*, we read, “with regard to some Indians who were brought from the Indies and sold in the city to the archbishop and in other parts of Andalucia by command of our Admiral of the Indies, we

command you to set them free and we have given them to the commendador [governor] Fray Francisco of Bobadilla to take them under his power to the Indies and send them free” (p. 439-440).

Catholicism in the New World: Communication Issues

According to historians, the Queen of Spain was interested in the preaching of Catholicism to the natives; this was not a simple task, as we read in others documents. On September 11, 1494, the King and Queen sent a *cedula* (CDIA #30), to Padre Fray Bruyl. Father Bruyl was having problems preaching to the natives because of the lack of interpreters. The Crown commanded the priest, “regarding what you wrote, about the fact that you can not carry out your responsibilities in Hispaniola because of the lack of an interpreter and because there are no Indians who can serve as an interpreters. For this reason you have requested that you be allowed to return. It is our will that this does *not* happen” (p. 304-305). They added that the work of the priest was very important in the Hispaniola. Columbus was asked to work on the same task. The King and Queen wrote, “we believe that God wants you to work diligently to bring the natives to peace and mainly they should be converted to our Catholic faith” (p. 451). This document suggests that the communication between Spaniards and Tainos was minimal.

We know that the need for interpreters was key in Hispaniola, “the Admiral Christopher Columbus sent nine Indians to be given to some people to learn the language. These nine Indians are not for sale, only for learning the language” ...in Spain and also to become Christians” (CDIA #30 p. 363). The first Tainos were baptized on September 21, 1496, four years after the encounter between the Tainos and Columbus. Juan Mateo, a native from Hispaniola, received, “the holy baptism” as reported by the priest Juan

Ramon Pane, who learned the Tainos language and later wrote one of the most complete works on Tainos Culture, *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* (Pane, 1571/1999). However, the language problem was not the only issue. Other problems troubled the Columbus endeavor.

Failure of Colonization Efforts

After two years, the 1,500 men Columbus brought on his second trip, found themselves without food, plagued with tropical diseases, divided in factions of Columbus supporters and non supporters, and with the most important problem of all, no gold. The King and Queen of Spain recognized the failures and in a document written to Columbus on June 1, 1495 (CDIA #30), they, “commanded (Columbus) to allow the people with great needs to return to Spain. You should do this because we think there are a lot of people living on salary in Hispaniola and it is too hard to bring all the necessary provisions for them. It is our opinion having 500 people in Hispanola is sufficient” (p. 357). Thus, Columbus’ venture was falling apart because it was too costly for the Crown.

Criminals Sent to Hispaniola

The Hispaniola problem required a solution to maintain free labor in Hispaniola and this is probably why the Crown resorted to the previously unknown solution of sending criminals under the command of Columbus, to provide free labor on Hispaniola. It happened on June 22, 1497 (CDIA #38), *Pardon to all the subjects and naturals (living in Spain) of these kingdoms (Spain) who have committed any crime that are committed to go in person to serve in Hispanola at their expense for a certain time to do what the Admiral commands them.*

The document stated, “We want and order that all and any male person and many of our subjects and naturals that have committed, until the day of the publication of this letter, murder or crime of any nature with the exception of heresy... those who deserve punishment of death, they can go for two years and those who deserve a minor punishment that is not murder or that may be the loss of a member [a hand or foot] can go for a year. They will be pardoned for any murder or crime no matter what gravity those are...For this document we pardon all of the crimes that they committed and from now forward they should not be accused of those crimes” (p. 388-389).

To support this free labor system, a prison was established in Seville Spain, where the criminals were to stay until released to Hispaniola. There are two additional documents that discussed the same topic. The first document is called, *Document from the Catholic King and Queen sent to the courts of the kingdom asking for the delivery to Christopher Columbus or those under his command all the criminals that deserve the punishment of death or loss of any member of their body due to the crime that they have done until the publication of this document to be taken to the Indies to serve under the command of the Admiral for the time determined and after they will be free from all the punishment of their crimes* (June 22, 1497, CDIA #36)..

The second document is called, *Letter of instructions from the Catholic King and Queen to the Count Cifuentes, Assistant Mayor of Seville commanding him to receive and keep prisoners of crimes that are going to be exiled to Hispanola until they are delivered to the Admiral of said Indies or before public notary and the cost of their trip will be paid from their goods if they have any* (June 22, 1497, CDIA #36).

Economic Interests in Hispaniola

In spite of the problems that Columbus experienced on Hispaniola, he did receive some economic benefit. In CDIA#30 the King and Queen provided, “that for three years the Admiral can remove first the one-eighth for himself, without any cost and after deducting the production costs he can remove one-tenth” (p. 448). The King and Queen provided detailed instructions for Columbus on how he was to spend the additional money that they had sent to him in 1497 (CDIA #30), “You should do things to our service and work to establish a better government and negotiations with the Indians” (p. 451). The also talked about how gold should be handled, “we believe that the gold that would be in the Indies should be converted into coins” (p. 455).

The King and Queen also imposed a taxing system that obligated all the Indians in the Hispaniola to pay taxes and the punishment was established for those who were delinquent in paying their taxes. CDIA #30 details the tribute process, “Since we agree that the Indians should pay a tribute, we order you to make tokens of metal and tin with signs. And when the Indians pay a tribute, you give them a token that they are to wear around their necks. And when they pay the next tribute, you give them a token with another sign so that you will know who has not paid. And if you find Indians on the Island who are not wearing a token, you should imprison them or give them a small punishment” (p. 455-456).

Columbus never lost his economic interest in the venture. This was illustrated on February 22 1498, when, in CDIA #30, *Testament and Authorization of the Admiral Mr. Christopher Colon*, the Monarchy wrote, “we expect that God will give us a good profit from the islands and firm land, because I have been given one eighth of the profit and

salaries and right aforesaid. And because we are mortals, it is well that each one order and leave declared to his heirs what I write these things down” (p. 483).

The Third Voyage–1498

A Brief Summary of What We Know

Third Voyage Exploration

Christopher Columbus began his third voyage on May 1, 1498. On his way to Hispaniola, he explored the southern coast of Trinidad and the Peninsula of Paria where he found ornaments made from pearls and copper-gold alloy. He sailed on to Santo Domingo on the southern coast by way of Cubagua, the Margarita Islands, and across the Caribbean Sea (Morison, 1970; Varela, 2000; Cohen, 1969).

Columbus’ Administration

Francisco Roldan was still angry about the abandonment of Isabela. Christopher Columbus upon his return in the summer of 1498, authorized Roldan to seize Tainos in the chiefdom of Xaragua and divide them among his followers to use them as forced laborers in the goldfields. This action became known as *repartimiento*. The Roldanistas remained in Xaragua like feudal lords, controlling thousands of Indians” (Floyd, 1973, p. 46).

Christopher Columbus tried unsuccessfully for the next two years to administer the colony while living in Santo Domingo. However, the goldfields never produced as much gold as expected and thus many of the colonists returned to Spain because they could not make a living. Other colonists rebelled against Columbus’s rule (Sauer, 1966; Floyd, 1973).

During Columbus' eight-year governorship, Spaniards occupied much of the western and central regions of Hispaniola and established a chain of forts that linked the northern and southern coasts. Finally, the colonizers discovered gold in some quantity although not in the quantity originally predicted. By a sequence of trial and error, Columbus moved from a system of barter to tribute to forced labor (Deive, 1995; Floyd, 1973). Factionalism between those who supported Columbus and those who did not became the dominant characteristic in Hispaniola. "Underlying factionalism was the almost constant disparity between great expectations and dismal reality" (Floyd, 1973, p. 20). Columbus' return to Spain is described next in Chapter Four.

Fray Ramon Pane's Eyewitness Account

Fray Ramon Pane completed his manuscript, *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* in 1498. While the original manuscript was lost, the full text survives because Columbus's illegitimate son, Ferdinand included all of it in a later biography he wrote in defense of his father, *History of the Admiral Don Cristopher Columbus by his Son Don Fernando* (1571/1999). (Unable to publish his biography because of the political climate in Spain, we have come to rely on Alfonso de Ulloa's Italian translation published in 1571.) Pane's was one of the first eyewitness accounts of the initial encounter between Spaniards and the Tainos. An English translation of Pane's, *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* was published in 1999.

The Fourth Voyage—1502

A Summary of What We Know

Columbus back in Spain insisted on being allowed to continue his explorations on a fourth voyage to the New World in the area of what is now the Gulf of Mexico. He sailed from Cadiz, Spain on May 9, 1502. He suffered much hardship and famine and after reaching San Lucas on November 7, 1504, he laid sick for several months. Upon his recovery, he returned for the final time to Spain as a simple passenger of a ship. As the ship passed by Hispaniola, he took his last view of the Island that he “discovered,” but was no longer permitted to step foot on. In Spain physically weak, but in full possession of his faculties, he described his situation, "I had no place to repair to but an inn, and often with nothing to pay for my sustenance" (<http://stanklos.com/virtualpubliclibrary/hallofstamps/voyagesofcolumbus.com/>). The discoverer of a New World died on May 20, 1506 in Valladolid, Spain at No. 2 Calle Ancha de la Magdalena, a small apartment of a modest house, with a few faithful friends and followers at his bedside. A small tablet on the front of the two-story stone building some 600 years old, briefly states, "Here died Columbus."

Summary

This chapter summarized the encounter between the Tainos and the Columbus. The failure of the colonization efforts and gold production lead to the beginning of the downfall of the Tainos people. Chapter 4 describes the government on Hispaniola after the fall of Christopher Columbus.

CHAPTER 4
THE POST-CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
GOVERNMENT 1500-1509

This chapter describes the government Hispaniola between 1500 and 1509 after the fall of Christopher Columbus. The King and Queen of Spain attempted to improve the administration of Hispaniola by replacing Christopher Columbus with first Bobadilla and then Ovando.

The Spanish government documents, not previously translated, provide rich detail about the reign of Bobadilla (1500-1502) and Ovando (1502-1509). For continuity and to place the information from the Spanish government documents in context, this chapter contains a brief summary of what we currently know about each of these two leaders.

Bobadilla's Brief Reign 1500-1501

A Brief Summary of What We Know

In the fall of 1500, after Columbus' repeated failures at governing the colony at Santo Domingo, the King and Queen of Spain sent Francisco de Bobadilla to take over the government. Bobadilla was so frustrated by what he found that he shipped Columbus, his brother Bartolome and his son Diego back to Spain in chains (Paiewonsky, 1991; Floyd, 1973).

When Bobadilla took over from the Columbus family, there were only 300 Spanish colonists left living in Santo Domingo and a town in each of the goldfields. The King and Queen of Spain instructed Bobadilla to increase the output of the goldfields and free the Indians. He found these two instructions incompatible so he maintained the

system of *repartimiento* [forced labor] although he did not add to it. He increased the gold production by offering greater profits to the Spaniards whose Indians worked in the goldfields (Tyler, 1988; Sauer, 1966).

Reportedly, the King and Queen were upset with the fact that Bobadilla had sent Columbus back to Spain in chains and were also dissatisfied with the general disorder of the colony. Thus, after a brief tenure, Nicholas de Ovando was sent in 1502 to take over. Ovando sent Bobadilla back to Spain along with Roldan, the rebel leader from Isabela. Columbus, returning on a ship to Spain that stopped over in the Port of Santo Domingo (Columbus was not allowed to disembark) warned Ovando of an impending hurricane but he failed to listen to him (Floyd, 1973; Tyler, 1988). Consequently, Bobadilla and Roldan and 500 men died and 25 ships along with a substantial amount of gold were destroyed in the hurricane.

New Information from Spanish Government Documents

Transferring Authority to Ovando

It is important to stress that most of the CDIA documents have to do with the government of Hispaniola, in this case, the transfer of authority or governorship. In the *Real Cedula* [document] *granted al Fr. Nicolas de Ovando, commander de Lares* [place] *and gentleman of the order of Alcantara* [place], *the governorship of the Indies, with all the thanks and responsibilities that are written. Granada, September 3, 1501.* In CDIA #30, p. 542, the King and Queen of Spain gave many instructions to both Bobadilla and Ovando, but said nothing regarding the Tainos.

Lack of Abundance of Gold

Because the lack of abundance of gold on Hispaniola, new measures were taken by the King and Queen of Spain. In the, *Capitulacion* [document of power] *with Luis of Arriaga. Granada, September 5, 1501*, the Crown commanded, “from all the gold that is collected by them or the Indians that remains with them on the Islands they are obligated to give us half of the gold with no cost to us” (CDIA #30, p. 526-528). Not only did the taxes on the gold mines increase but also on other items, “and from all the goods that the Indians have on the cotton island [Hispaniola], from everything that Indians have domain over and the villages they should give us one third of everything” (p. 529). This suggests that the economy of the Hispaniola during this period of time was almost completely sustained by the work of the Indians in the mines and agriculture.

In order to protect the Crown’s interest, they sent Diego Martin to monitor the gold production. *The Real title of monitor and sealer of the silver and the gold that was removed of the Island Hispaniola given to Diego Martin* [possibly a Shipment clerk]. Granada, September 22, 1501. “It is our will that you [Diego Martin] be our monitor of the gold and other metals –any that will be extracted and melted in Hispanola” (p. 57).

Slavery Prohibition Ignored

The Crown, looking for new economic sources, extended authorizations to new explorers to make profit from all the goods they might obtain in the New World with the exception of “slaves.” One of these documents is the, *Capitulacion* [agreement document] *with Mr. Diego de Lepe, citizen of the village of Palos (Spain). Agreement given by a mandate of your Highness, to discover the sea and the ocean. Granada, given*

on September 14, 1501 (CDIA #30). Slavery as we know was prohibited and this was specifically mentioned in the last document.

The King and Queen's orders with regard to slaves was ignored as evidenced during the same year three months later where we learn that Indian slaves were sold in Seville, Cadiz, Jerez and Cordoba and in other places. The following document was written on December 2, 1501, *Real Cedula* [document] *sent to Corregidor de Xerez de la Frontera* [of the Frontier or Hispaniola], *to investigate the Indians that were killed by Christopher Guerra and their companions. Investigate those Indians who he has sold and those who are still under his power and those who are still waiting to be sold* (CDIA # 31). "Christopher Guerra under our command went to the Canary Island to look for pearls. Others under his command took and killed Indians (women and men) from the island of Poymarem [unknown island]. Others were taken alive, brought and sold in the cities of Seville, Cadiz, Jerez, and Cordoba and in other places. Some of them are still in his power. This was done against our command because the Indians are our subjects so we would like to know what really happened" (p. 104-105). It suggests that Indian slavery continued, beyond the control of King and Queen of Spain, and their orders were not enforced in the Hispaniola or the surrounding islands. This supports the reports of Bartolome de Las Casas, who arrived in Hispaniola in 1502. Las Casas attributed the suffering of the natives to the Spaniards.

The King and Queen were apparently worried about the power of defense the natives might have with powder guns, on September 16, 1501, when they sent the, *Real Cedula* [document], *no citizen on the island or firm land will sell or trade offensive arms to the Indians. Neither should the Indians be allowed to obtain them* (CDIA #31). The

violation of these commands was to be severe punishment as follows, “we command that no Christian sell nor exchange arm offensives to the Indians nor should the Indians trade for them under the punishment of 1,000 maravedis or their value for the first time...for the second time they will lose half of all of their goods...and by the third time, all of their goods” (p. 45).

The subjugation of the Tainos not only came from the lack of political freedom, it was also a cultural and religious subjugation. Catholicism was the only religion permitted in Hispaniola, with no chance for other religions, “inasmuch as we, with a great deal of effort have tried to convert the Indians to ours holy Catholic faith and there remain suspicious persons of our faith, the conversion would be more difficult: [Thus], you should not allow any Muslims, Jews, heretics, or reconciled, or people who converted themselves to our faith” (CDIA #31, p. 2).

The lack of Spaniards in Hispaniola at the time was a serious continuing problem, and a new solution was necessary. In an effort to populate Hispaniola with new Spaniards, the King and Queen of Spain established an *Agreement with Alonzo Velez de Mendoza, on February 15, 1502* (CDIA #31). The document contained very specific instructions about how to populate Hispaniola.

The orders were very explicit: “Alonzo Velez of Mendoza will take some men and women with their families to settle Hispanola with no salaries and they will serve and live there with no salaries...if some of these Christians do not follow our command, or if they rebel or if some of the Indians rise against our services you should fight them in a war” (p. 121). Of course, the instructions also contained information about their share in the mine production, “of all the gold they or their Indians collect or any other persons

living on the Island they will be obligated to give us half of that gold with no cost to us” (p. 121-123). From the agriculture production, the share was extended to the natives, “everything that the Indians from the Cotton Island take and the things that they make, they are obligated to give us one third except for the things they need to sustain themselves” (p. 121-123).

The King and Queen of Spain obtained all the wealth coming from the Hispaniola because of the forced labor and production of the Tainos. Moreover, the Crown created the La Casa de Contratacion [House of Trade] to control all the goods coming from the Americas to Spain (CDIA #31). The Casa de Contratacion was authorized to be created on January 20 of 1503, as we read in, *Instructions to build a contract house in Seville for the negotiation of commerce of the Indies*. The purpose of the house was clearly defined, “This house will be used to manage all the things that are sent from our kingdoms and about the rights that should be in place on the Island so our profit maybe increased without too much harm to the population on the islands” (p.150-151). The document contained 20 points and in none of them was there any information about the Tainos, the ones that made possible the existence of La Casa de Contratacion.

Ovando’s Reign 1502-1509

A Brief Summary of What We Know

Nicolas de Ovando, a forceful and brutal governor, arrived in Santo Domingo in 1502. He brought with him 2,500 colonists including the first Spanish families to arrive in Hispaniola (Tyler, 1988; Floyd, 1973). Many of the men went to work in the goldfields where they perished. Other colonists established farms that consisted mainly

of livestock because the Spanish crops did not grow well in the tropic environment (Sauer, 1966).

Queen Isabela died on November 26, 1504 and their daughter Juana became the Queen of Castile with Ferdinand as the curator. (There were those who thought that Juana was “mad.” Thus, Ferdinand was appointed her curator.) Thus, Ferdinand’s ability and power to oversee the colonization effort waned for a period of three years. Ovando served as a bridge during these troubled times (Floyd, 1973).

Bartolome de Las Casas

Bartolome de Las Casas accompanied Ovando to Hispaniola in 1502. Las Casas came to the islander as an adventurer. He was a friend of the Columbus family and heard much of the available opportunities having witnessed the return of the Nina after Columbus’s first voyage nine years earlier. His father and three of his uncles had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage. Once in Hispaniola, he began at age 18, to collect materials for what would prove to be a lifetime work, *Historia de las Indias* [History of the Indies]. Las Casas was still editing, rewriting, and polishing it as late as 1563 three years before his death at the age of 92 (Carlo, 1965). Las Casas also abstracted Columbus’s diary before it disappeared and that handwritten abstract he called, *El Libro de la Primera Navegacion* [The Book of the First Navigation] also known as the *Diario de Colon* [Journal of Columbus] (Fuson, 1987).

Ovando Evolves Repartimiento System
into the Encomiendas System

The King and Queen of Spain ordered Ovando to relocate the native people near the goldfields so that they would be close to their work. He ignored that order and refined and expanded the *repartimiento* system (the practice of, assigning whole Indian communities to individual Spanish settlers for use in the goldfields or on ranches. In fact, Spanish citizens owned land that had Indian communities assigned to it.) Each community spent six months at work and was then allowed to return to its own village for six months of recuperation. Later, the recuperation time was reduced to four months as the needed for forced labor increased. The advantage of the of this new system that Ovando called *encomiendas* was that it allowed the Indians to retain their own culture and language which they reverted to during their rest periods (Deive, 1995; Sauer, 1966; Koning, 1976).

The system unfortunately, didn't work for the Tainos people. They died in the goldfields. The Tainos were overworked, undernourished and living in unsanitary conditions which caused them to contract illnesses. "They were not allowed enough free time to obtain meat and fish, whose protein they needed to supplement the starch provided by their cassava bread and sweet potatoes" (Rouse, 1992, p. 154).

Ovando's Atrocities Against the Tainos

Ovando systematically eliminated the principal chiefs first in the chiefdom of Higüey and then in Xaragua. In Higüey, shortly after Ovando's arrival in 1502, the native people rebelled to protest the killing of one of their chiefs by a Spanish dog. In response, Ovando rounded up six or seven hundred Tainos in a chief's house and had

them knifed to death. In Xaragua in the fall of 1503, he visited Chief Anacaona, the wife of Canoabo, who succeeded her brother Behechchio after his death. Anacaona convened a meeting with some 80 district chiefs and Ovando blocked the door and burned them alive. Anacaona was hung in respect to her position. She represented the last of the independent chiefdoms in Hispaniola (Paiewonsky, 1991; Floyd, 1973).

The King and Queen did attempt to restrict the practice of slavery by limiting it to Caribs. (Caribs were regarded as cannibals because they had shown hostility toward the Spaniards and the Spaniards had found human bones on their island.) They ordered Rodrigo de Figueroa, a lawyer in Santa Domingo to determine which islanders were “Caribs” and which were *guaitio* [peaceful Indians], not subject to slavery. After two years of questioning sailors who came to Santo Domingo, Figueroa came to the conclusion that only the natives of the Virgin Islands and the Lesser Antilles, (Barbados excepted), were “Caribs” (Sauer, 1966; Hulme, 1986).

By the end of Ovando’s term as governor in 1509, there were only sixty thousand Tainos people left on Hispaniola. All were members of *encomiendas*. The Spaniards on the other hand had adjusted to the tropics and prospered. Their population increased to about ten thousand, living in fifteen *villas* [towns] distributed throughout the island (Cassa, 1974).

New Information from Spanish Government Documents

Treatment of Natives

One of the most important documents of this post Columbus period was sent to Nicolas de Ovando before he left Spain to become the new governor. It is the,

Instructions to the Commander of Lores Fray Nicolas de Ovando of the order of Alcantara, about what to do with the Islands and firm Land as a governor, written by the King and Queen in Granada, September 16, 1501 (CDIA #31). In these instructions there are several important points regarding the treatment of natives. “Because we have been informed about some Christians on the Islands, especially on Hispanola that Spaniards have taken wives and daughters from the Indians and other things against their will: When you get there, you should order them to return everything that was taken against the will of the Indians and defend them and give great penalties from now on to anybody who does these same things. A woman should not be forced to marry or be taken by force” (p. 16).

The poor treatment of natives in Hispaniola was well known and has been reported by some historians, however, few of these historians recognized part of the reason for the bad treatment was associated with the contradictions in the orders from the Crown. This document is an example of that. The King and Queen of Spain commanded Ovando, “We ask that you treat the Indians well.” They can travel throughout the land and nobody should force them, robe them, or cause any harm to them. You should punish the people who do not treat the Indians well according to their delinquency” (p 15). However in the same document, they commanded Ovando to exploit the natives, “and for taking the gold and doing other labors that we send you to do, it will be necessary to use the service of the Indians” (p. 16). And they also forced the natives to pay tributes to the crown, “It is our will that the Indians pay tributes to us in the same manner that our subjects do in our kingdoms. You should talk with the Chief and the

principals and all the Indians that you contact. With their consensus, you will set up the agreement with them about the amount to pay every year” (p. 16).

These controversial orders stressed the problems that already existed between the Tainos and Spaniards. The King and Queen failed to recognize that the real issue was not only the Spaniards in Hispaniola, but also their own commands they had given to them.

They commanded the natives to accept subjugation, with no chance to defend themselves, “because among the Christians and the Indians there should be all peace and friendship and agreement, that among them there should not be noises, nor scandals. You will ensure that nobody will give, sell, or trade defensive guns to the Indians” (p. 22).

Construction of Indian Towns

The number of natives drastically decreased by the early 1500’s and thus, the King and Queen of Spain were apparently concerned about the treatment of natives. In spite of the many orders they gave, no important changes were instituted with regard to the humane treatment of the natives. In the document, *Instructions for the governor and officials about the government of the Indies and the things that should be observed*, written on March 20, 1503 (CDIA #31). The King and Queen of Spain, commanded the construction of Indian towns and specified the administration of them, “It is necessary that the Indians move into towns and live together, and no one be apart from the others throughout the jungle. In the town, each one should have a house with a wife and daughters and sons cultivating the land, raising animals, and in each town that is built, they should have a church and a priest charged to indoctrinate and teach about our Holy Catholic Faith” (p. 157). Also they continued, “We command that the governor be very

careful to ensure that each one of the Indians has a separate house for his family in the same manner that all our citizens have in our kingdoms” (p. 158).

The King and Queen at the same time seemed to recognize the negative influence the Spaniards had on the life of the Tainos people. Apparently, after ten years of interaction, the Tainos started partially adopting some of the Spaniards customs, we read in the same document, “you [governor] should be in charge of teaching the Indians how to sanctify themselves, how to command themselves to God and pray, how to confess and how to do all the other things of the well-taught” (p. 156-174). The crown added, “The people who blaspheme or swear in the name of God, Our Lord or of our Virgin Mary, should be avoided because the Indians learn from the Christians to say similar things” (p. 156-174). “The Indians should stop the things they have been doing up to now. They should not bathe as many times as they have been doing. We have been informed that this custom harms them” (p. 156-174).

Slavery Prohibited Again

At the same time, the King and Queen of Spain again gave contradictory orders regarding the treatment of natives, we read, “...You should not allow the Christians to use the Indians as they were doing up until now [slavery]. But, only if the Indians wish to work by their own will and they must receive just journal [daily] wages” (CDIA #31, p. 156-174). The contradictory order comes next, “We have been informed that to have more profit from the gold, it is convenient that the Christians on the Island use the Indians....” (p. 156-174). They justify their order with, “It is convenient for us to use their service as long as the Indians are not treated badly or being aggravated by the Christians as it has happened up until today. They should be paid their salaries as we

declared. The Indians should come by their own will and not by another manner...” (p. 156-174).

Considering in their view, that better treatment meant better production, they added, “It will be better that the Indians serve us for certain days and times [scheduled days and times] and the Indians by their own will go to the mines to extract the gold for us. And using this process, our profits can increase” (p. 156-174).

Secret Document Regarding Building of Towns and Houses

The absurd pretense of virtue manifested by the King and Queen was openly displayed the same day when they wrote the following *secret* document, *Secret instructions for the governor Fray Nicolas of Ovando, Cartagena, March 29, 1503* (CDIA #31, p. 156). The reason for building towns and houses for natives and giving them better opportunities and administration had only one objective, and it was clearly declared in this “secret” document. The King and Queen of Spain directly commanded Ovando, “When you build some of the villages as you were instructed to build, build some of them close to the mines so it will be easy to get more gold” (p. 176).

They went farther in their request, “We were going to send some things to the Indians, these things are good and new for them so maybe they will come by their own will. We should study the different manners and ways that we should employ for bringing the Indians using their own will and good disposition” (p. 178-179). In other words, they asked Ovando to exploit the native people of Hispaniola.

Forced Labor Continues

Hispaniola depended mainly on the forced labor of the natives, as described, in the *Real Cedula* [document] *to the citizens of Hispanola* [Indians] *they will serve the Christians in the farming and working with animals and extracting the gold, receiving daily wages*, written on December 20, 1503 (CDIA #31). The King and Queen of Spain even included additional areas regarding the used of natives, “we commanded that the Indians living on the Island of Hispanola, and subject to servitude I have been informed because the Indians have so many liberties, they have left and have walked away from conversations with the Christians even though we wanted to pay them a salary. They do not want to work and are vagabonds. It makes it difficult to indoctrinate them and to convert them to our Holy Catholic Faith...and continue the extraction of gold” (p. 210).

The crown suggested the following solution, “Each chief should be in charge of a number of Indians so that the group will be able to work wherever work is needed. Each chief should go with a number of Indians to the places you assign them or to the people that ask for them” (p. 211). And the always contradictory statement, “but they should do this as free citizens as they are and not as servants.”

The exploitation of Tainos people did not end because the orders of the King and Queen of Spain were never implemented. According to the government documents that I reviewed, whether Queen Isabela really defended the Tainos as historians have reported is questionable. If indeed her true aim was protection of the Tainos, the effort was almost completely abandoned with her death in 1504.

La Casa de Contration: [House of Trade]

Administratively, La Casa de Contration [House of Trade] became a complex institution, new regulations and statutes were added in 1/1/1505 (CDIA #31, p. 323). The document was called, *Orders about the freedoms and restrictions that will "LaCasa de Contratacion" [House of Trade] of Seville will have regarding the Indies*. The document contained 25 very important points, 7 of them specifically concerned gold and 4 concerned the Tainos people in Hispaniola. These 4 points were about the taxes the natives were to pay, the repartition of goods they might be lost in case of war, slavery in the Caribbean, and the prohibited selling of guns to Indians. This document, as well as the one written in 1503, did not include any information or orders regarding the treatment of the Tainos.

Native people continued paying taxes as we read in the document, *Agreement with Vicente Yanez de Pinzon to go and discover, Bull, April 24 of 1505* (CDIA #31), “from all the gold that you or the people have collected or will collect and the Indians are with you on the Island will be obligated to give me [King of Spain] one fifth of the gold with no cost to me” (p. 343).

Summary

The King and Queen of Spain, frustrated with Columbus' administration of Hispaniola, unsuccessfully replaced him with first Bobadilla and then shortly thereafter, with Ovando. Both of these leaders were extremely brutal in their treatment of the Tainos people despite orders from the Crown to treat them fairly. The slavery prohibition was conveniently ignored in order to have forced labor to work in the goldfields. They

unsuccessfully tried to get the Tainos to live in towns conveniently located near the goldfields with chief's coordinating activities.

The King and Queen put Diego Martin in charge of monitoring the gold production and they set up a House of Trade but production did not increase. The situation on the Island continued to deteriorate. Queen Isabela's death in 1504 left her daughter Juana as Queen of Castile. Juana and her father, Ferdinand then jointly ruled Hispaniola. The result was a continued disjointed effort of ineffective leadership.

The post Columbus years 1500–1509, thus came to an end. Christopher Columbus died in 1506 and his son Diego convinced King Ferdinand that he was entitled to take over the governorship on Hispaniola. Chapter 5 describes the reign and fall of Diego Colon (Columbus) from 1509 to 1524.

CHAPTER 5
THE REIGN AND FALL OF
DIEGO COLON (COLUMBUS) (1509-1524)

This chapter describes the reign and fall of Christopher Columbus' son, Diego Columbus between 1509 and 1524. The Spanish government documents, not previously translated, provide rich details about the transfer of gold and power to Columbus' son Diego, the assimilation and conversion of the Tainos, the population of the Hispaniola and Davila's recommendations for improving conditions on Hispaniola.

For continuity and to place the information from the Spanish government documents in context, this chapter begins with a brief summary of what we currently know about the Reign of Diego Columbus.

The Reign of Diego Columbus

A Brief Summary of What We Know

Diego Columbus, son of Christopher Columbus assumed the governorship of Hispaniola in 1509 just as the Island set into one of several depressions. His father Columbus having died, Diego convinced King Ferdinand that he was entitled to the position and the fortune originally promised his father. King Ferdinand, having lost a great deal of his power following the death of Queen Isabela in 1504, consented but attempted to closely supervise Columbus's activities (Floyd 1973).

Among Ferdinand's leading supporters was the Duke of Alba whose relatives and *criados* [servants] included Diego Columbus, a nephew by marriage and heir to the titles,

and privileges of the Discoverer. Floyd's (1973) opinion is that Ferdinand named Diego governor in 1508 to keep peace with the Duke, a supporter for Diego's contested rule.

Disolving the Encomiendas

The first task Diego set out to accomplish was to dissolve the *encomiendas* that were held by those living in Spain and redistribute the Indians to the remaining *encomiendas* held by people living in Hispaniola. The king granted the *encomiendas* for the lifetime of its holder, with the provision that the holder pay one peso per year for each Indian. The king also required that at all times, encomenderos employ one-third of their Indians in the mines. The fact that King Ferdinand was the largest absentee-holder of all, with several thousand Natives, started an irreparable rift between Diego Columbus and King Ferdinand (Floyd, 1973; Sauer, 1966).

Conflict Between Diego and King Ferdinand

In May of 1512, three judges and a royal fiscal agent sent by King Ferdinand arrived at Santo Domingo to defend the royal interests and ensure that Diego Columbus was not making unwarranted claims. As the *repartidor de indios* [administrator of the Indians], Diego controlled the labor supply for the mines and farms of Hispaniola. He alone would make decisions, sometimes in spite of conveniently ignored royal cédulas [documents]. Several people tied to the Columbus family profited during those times and conflict resulted between Columbus and King Ferdinand (Floyd, 1973).

An additional source of conflict was over just what territory Diego Columbus could obtain one-tenth of the royal income from, what powers Columbus could exercise as distinguished from royal residual powers, and lastly which of Colon's powers and

privileges were hereditary. In the later half of 1514, King Ferdinand recalled Diego fearing that a civil war over the control of the Tainos was imminent. Diego returned to Spain and waited for five years before returning to power after King Ferdinand died and King Charles V took power (Tyler, 1988; Floyd, 1973).

Laws of Burgos and the Dominican Priests

Between 1512-1513 King Ferdinand promulgated the *Laws of Burgos* designed to ameliorate the working and living conditions of the Tainos. One of the laws required that Indians be relocated in Spanish villages in order to facilitate their conversion to the Catholic faith and their adoption of a Spanish life style. However, they did not start implementing these laws until late in 1514 and never fully implemented them. Thus, the laws seemed to have little impact on the conditions of life for the Tainos Indians (Floyd, 1973; Deive, 1995)

The Dominican priests however continued to campaign to free the Tainos Indians. Las Casas in 1512 became the first priest to be ordained in the New World (Carlo, 1965). On Pentecost Sunday in 1514, Las Casas condemned the Spanish colonists for their treatment of the Tainos people. He came to believe that the *encomienda* system was wrong. He soon thereafter released all of his slaves and became known as the *Protector of the Indians*.

Cristobal Lebron Replaces Columbus - 1515

King Ferdinand appointed Cristobal Lebron who arrived in June, 1515 to replace Colon but before he could make much progress in Hispaniola, King Ferdinand died (January 23, 1516). Charles V, son of Juana, daughter of Ferdinand, was named as

Ferdinand's successor. However, King Charles V did not assume his duties and move to Spain until the autumn of 1517.

Colon Returns to Power-1520

Diego Columbus returned as governor of Hispaniola in 1520 after convincing the new King Charles V to allow him to return. Diego was selected because of his connections with the family of King Charles V and because he had the reputation of being more humane to the Indians. It was felt that Diego's personal financial interest in the land would help to spur its development. After restoring Diego's position and his power on May 17, 1520, King Charles V left Spain for the Germanies to assume the position of Royal Holy Emperor. Bishop Rodriguez de Fronseca [who took over for King Charles] disagreeing with the King's decision, quickly put forward legislation that eroded or curbed Colon's powers. However, Deigo once in Santo Domingo interpreted the laws as he saw fit (Floyd, 1973).

Upon his return, Diego Columbus found a colony where the encomienda system was at its end and as current holders died or were proved to be abusive, the Indians were freed. Diego spent the next three years implementing the same tactics as he had before and in March, 1523 King Charles V reprimanded Columbus and recalled him for discussions. King Charles V felt that Diego had exceeded his powers, taking over the justice system, intervening in Indian affairs, collecting his one-tenth from illegal sources and exercising Church patronage. The King's reprimand order also revoked all such acts. Diego departed for Spain on September 8, 1523 leaving his wife Maria, who was about to give birth to their eighth child as *virreina* [viceroyn] (Floyd, 1973).

Taino Population

The attrition of the Indian population was slow but continuous. The Census in 1514 recorded only 22,726 persons able to work (Demorizi, 1514). Some Indians discouraged by their lot, committed suicide, hanging themselves or poisoning themselves with cassava juice. Disease was undoubtedly the largest factor in the population decline. The Spaniards brought diseases such as smallpox in Columbus' second trip and the Black slaves from Africa brought malaria (Cook, 2002).

The number of Tainos in the encomiendas was also reduced by *outmarriage*. There was a shortage of Spanish women in the colony and the Spanish men readily took Indian wives (Floyd, 1973). (Spaniards compensated for the decline of the encomiendas by increasing the importation of Indian slaves from other parts of the Caribbean area and Black slaves from Africa. By the time that Diego Colon completed his term as viceroy, there were more slaves than Tainos; and by 1540, the former had almost completely replaced the later. The Jeronymite priests devoted the rest of the time that they remained on the island to freeing the Indians held by absentee Spaniards.

New Information from Spanish Government Documents

Transfer of Gold and Power to Columbus' Son, Diego

The hunger for gold did not end with the death of Columbus in 1506, it continued as gold is mentioned in the transfer document of possessions given to his son Diego, Transfer of a Cedula [document] of the King of Spain, given to the son of the Admiral Mr. Diego Columbus in Villafranca, on June 2 of 1506 (CDIA #30). Part of the document said, "I order that all that Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Indies had be

freely transferred to his heirs including all the gold and other things that came from the Indies, to do with as they will..." (p.540). The word gold was mentioned on one page of this document three times.

The King of Spain also transferred the powers that Diego's father had in a document called, *Instructions that were given al Admiral Mr. Diego Columbus* [Christopher Columbus' son], *Valladolid, May 3 of 1509* (CDIA #31). The King commanded Diego Columbus, "after you arrive to Hispaniola, find information about what the mines are producing ...and work to provide all that is necessary to extract all the gold possible from the mines and keep us informed"(p. 395). Among these instructions, again we find a contradictory order, "You should inform the Chief and principal of the Island on my behalf, that it is my will that they and their Indians are well treated as our subjects and if somebody from our own does them wrong and causes harm to them. Diego should let us know because Diego has the order to punish those cases. And Diego will see that the Indians are well treated—that no one forces them or steals from them or treats them wrongly in words or any other manner and the Indians and their women can travel through all the land" (p. 392). "You should say to the Chief that it is our will that the Spaniards treat the Indians well" (p. 388-395).

Assimilation of the Natives

Treating Indians "well" must have had different meanings for King Charles V, because in the same document he also order Diego, "You should order the Indians not to conduct celebrations or ceremonies as they used to do if they are still doing that. They should live in the manner as do the people in our kingdoms" (p. 393).

We read of some of the Tainos' misconceptions they apparently learned from the Spaniards: "Because we have commanded the Indians who have heritage of the lands [Indians were given land] not to sell or trade with a low value as they did before. You will command the people who are living close to them not to buy or trade for their land. If it is necessary for the natives to sell, try to get them to sell at a just value. At the same time, you will try to get the Indians to be dressed and behave as reasonable men" (p.388-395).

About how far the King wanted the natives to assimilate to the Spanish culture is contentious, since the King apparently did not want the Indians to become too much like Spaniards. In the document, *Do not sell, trade, exchange, or borrow guns to the Indians. Take guns from Indians. Instructions that were given al Admiral Mr. Diego Columbus , Valladolid, May 3 of 1509* (CDIA #31), the King commanded, "Do not sell, trade, exchange, or borrow offensive arms guns to the Indians. You should punish them according to their faults. If you find any of these items with the Indians, you should take those from them or obligate them to give these items back" (p. 388-395).

Conversion to Christianity

Charles V, the new King of Spain, wrote to the Pope, Letter from the Catholic King and Queen to their ambassador in Rome, asking that the Holiness for the institution of "patriarchal of the Indians" in the Archbishop Mr. Juan de Fonseca and the bishop of Darien (in Panama) for Father Juan de Quevedo authorizing his Highness to establish the limit of the dioceses and the division of tithings. Valladolid, July 26, 1513 (CDIA #39). Twenty years has passed since the first encounter between Columbus and the Tainos, many of the natives on Hispaniola were decimated, and apparently, 20 years was not

enough time to convert these natives to Christianity. Nonetheless, the Crown continued its push the preaching of Catholicism to other natives in the Americas. King Charles V said, “I believe the firm land is populated by a great multitude of people, who are more reasonable and capable [than the Tainos]. Instructed and indoctrinated in the things of our Holy Faith...we desire that such a great multitude of souls be saved” (p. 265). A few years later that happened and the destiny of the new people on the firm land encountered followed almost the same fate as the Tainos of Hispaniola.

King Charles V added, “The barbarous nations [referring to the Tainos] should be brought to obedience of our Holy Mother Church and be set apart from the infidels [non-Christians] where they are and from the diverse and great errors that the enemy has subjugated” (p. 266). This period of time, was the time of Jose Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolome de Las Casas, and other noble citizens of the Hispaniola who according to their interpretations defended the Tainos on Hispaniola or suggested, in their view, better ways of using the natives without contributing to their extermination.

Atrocities Against Tainos

One of the most significant documents written at that time was the, Letter that was written by several Fathers from the Order of Santo Domingo, residents of Hispaniola Island to Monsenor Xevres in Santo Domingo, on June 4, 1516 (CDIA # 7, p. 397). The letter contains important information that supports Bartolome de Las Casas in his History of the Indies. The vivid description of the atrocities committed in Hispaniola is illustrated in the Las Casas’ writings. “We know that the Tainos in every instance gave good treatment to Spaniards.” However, “The Christians, on the contrary, wherever they arrived, in return for the benefit received, took their houses, women and daughters for

brutal uses...”(p. 399). “They [Spaniards] were people...not afraid of God, brutal, with a high desire for money, and full of many unclean passions. They started to destroy the land in so many ways that there is not writing or tongue enough to describe them” (p. 400).

Treatment of the Tainos

The description of the priests goes beyond what they said about the Spaniards: “these people with no faith, were indifferent, able kill them [the Tainos], capture them, take their lands, possessions, reigns, and things, with no conscience about it” (p. 401). They added, “the Castellians wasted all the crops they [Tainos] had for themselves, eating and destroying, in such a way that the Indians were forced to die of hunger, so many of them died, that nobody walked the land because of the odor” (p. 403).

We know that the Hispaniola did not have large animals such as horses or oxen, to be use for transportation, the priests described this situation in the letter, “in these land there were no beasts or any animals bigger than a rabbit, the Castellians used the natives in place of beasts to take their loads from one place to the other...and because these sad men were unclothed...they developed scrapes on their backs as beast” (p. 403).

Because of all the suffering inflicted on the natives, the Catholic priests justified the rebellion of the Tainos people against the Spaniards, they said, “the Indians with good reason and justice separated from the Christians, and arose and resisted because of their natural rights they were obligated to do that, mainly because at no time, did the Christians stopped treating the Indians worse than ‘brutal’ animals” (p. 409).

The description of the work in the mines was also a subject in the priests’ letter, “they [Indians] had a certain time to work in the service of gold, there they were so

forcefully put to work and received so little food maintenance that from every hundred [Indians] received for this service, seventy never returned” (p. 15). “The bed they [Indians] used most of the time was the dirt, around a hole that they created covered by ashes, as cats in winter around the fire, with no clothes, naked they received the humidity and cold of the night and the intolerable heat of the sun, walking and digging in the mines and farms of the Christians” (p. 419).

The fathers described the treatment of natives inside the mines, writing: “These miners did not call the Indians by other names but dogs, whipped them with cruelty, beat them with iron bars used for extracting the gold. Each miner has as a custom to sleep with each Indian woman uncharged as he pleased, no matter whether they were married or young...they sent the sad husband to extract gold in the mines and in the evening when he returned, they beat and whipped him, because he did not bring enough [gold]” (p. 422). Because of this, the Indians many times were confused about the religiosity of the Christians, “taking gold, that was the god of the Christians, because this is what Indians said, gold was their god, and that was the reason why they [Spaniards] loved gold so much” (p. 427).

Regarding the totally insufficient salary the natives received for their labor and, considering that many of them never received a salary because most of them died, the priests wrote, “In the end, after being overwhelmed by the work, a third of them died each year. At the end of each year, they [Tainos] received a shirt, or caperuza (hat), or a comb, or a belt that they wore around their naked waists, or a mirror [as salary]. [Each Indian was given what they wanted but it was paid for with the money that they earned for their service.] Each one as they [Indians] demanded to be bought, with the few coins

paid for their service” (p. 415). These injustices were publicly recognized by most of the Spaniards. However there were very few officials and citizens of Hispaniola who acted and tried to help the native people.

A few officials of the Crown who acted as the religious priests did inform the King about the injustices committed against the Tainos people. The next document described some of the writings of these officials. In 1513, in the, *Letter from the factor [financial controller] of Santo Domingo, Juan de Ampies to Your Majesty, telling him what was done with the Indians brought to the Hispaniola Island from surrounding islands and firm lands, many returning to Corazao* (CDIA #10), we learned more about slavery during period of time. We know that because of the decimation of natives, the King authorized the removing of submissive natives in the “unproductive” surrounding islands and the hunting of Caribbean natives from other islands and using them as slaves.

Unfortunately, the King’s authorization was not implemented, and many times, peaceful Indians were sold as slaves, not only in Hispaniola but also in Spain. Don Juan de Ampies, declared that, in Curazao [Jamaica] there were many peaceful Indians, ready to receive Catholicism. However, a man named, Gonzalo de Sevilla, along with a group of men, took some Indians from Curazao, “and the daughter of a great Chief...and brought them as slaves” (p. 31). In the document Juan de Ampies complained about this injustice to the Judges in Hispaniola, and finally was able to take this Indians back to Curazao. It was not always this way, because other writers reported that many times peaceful Indians were sold as slaves and nobody defended them. This account and those of others are revealed in the following documents.

Population of Hispaniola

The document written by the Fathers, presented some interesting information about the population of the Tainos at the time Columbus encountered the natives, they wrote, “In the matter, about the people that were counted, there was one million and a hundred thousand, all of them have been destroyed and minimized to no more than twelve thousands souls including children, adults, old and young, in health and sick” (CDIA #7, June 4, 1516, p. 400). The priests added, “That there were as many souls, we knew it from Don Bartolome [Columbus], brother of the Old Admirant... he [Bartolome] himself counted them by order of the Almirant, when once they wanted them [Indians] to pay taxes. Another priest...said that he did not believe that were so many souls, but he well knew that there were six hundred thousand. Now if they were six hundred thousand or more than two million, as others have affirmed, those who came first, saw that this Island was as populated as the land of Seville” (pp. 400-401).

Davila’s Letter to the King of Spain Describing Problems

Other officials opted for finding new ways of continuing to use the natives in production, but were more sympathetic with their sufferings. One of these officials was Gil Gonzalez de Davila, an educated man who wrote one of the most complete letters to the King of Spain in 1518. The document is called, *Account of Gil Gonzalez de Davila, bookkeeper of the King*, about the population of the Hispanola Island, where he lives. He suggested the causes of the depopulation of the island; He also proposed the potential solutions for new settlements, and another issues for the island (CDIA # 1, p. 332-347).

Gonzales de Davila, wrote in detail about his proposal to the King of Spain.

First he described the problems from a broad perspective, and then he offered some recommendations for addressing the problems.

Depopulation reasons. Davila described four reasons for the depopulation of Hispaniola, “There are four main reasons that caused the diminishing [population] on that Island” (referring to Spaniards and Indians on Hispaniola) (p. 332). The first one was, “the change of governors, it is the nature of Moorish men [mix of Spanish and Arabic] because of their passion and envy, they treat people differently. Some people they displace and others they favor and because of this, many people left the island” (p. 332).

Moving the Indians. “The second reason [for the depopulation] has been moving the Indians to work in other places for the Spaniards” (p. 332). The problems associated with changing their area of residence included, “they are sensible people and any small change cause great impact on them” (p. 332) and “the uncertainty that the Spaniards have always had about whether they could keep their Indians for working” (p. 333).

Legal disagreements. “The third reason that has contributed to the problems, has been the legal disagreements [lawsuits] among the Spaniards. The Spaniards spend so much time going to the towns to attend their suits, they have neglected of the good treatment of their Indians and their estates” (p. 333).

Need for gold. “The fourth [and last reason] and the most important has been that on the Island there has always been the need to obtain as much gold as possible without investing money for the development and conservation of the Island and without rest for the Indians” (p. 333). Davila concluded with the reasons by saying, “And so these are the most important things that caused the damage” (p. 333).

Davila's Suggested Solutions

Davila then proceeded to propose several solutions or recommendations for addressing the problems.

Stop transferring natives. “Regarding the transferring of Indians among the Spaniards, it will be important to stop the transferring. The Indians should be given to good people and in my opinion, they should be given for as long time as possible because the uncertainty of the length of time the Spaniards have the Indians leads to the poor treatment of the Indians” (p. 333).

Decrease mine work. Davila believed that the forced labor in the mines was one of the main causes of the drastic decrease of natives in Hispaniola. Davila wrote, “Your highness, I would suggest for three or four years, the gold exploitations should be reduced. This would result in less work for the Indians. I would also suggest that we bring in as many Caribbean slaves as possible because we have a diminishing number of Tainos natives” (p. 334). He felt that, “reducing the gold exploitations and bringing the Caribbean slaves may allow them [Tainos living in Hispaniola] to increase” (p. 335).

Bring natives from other islands. Davila continued by saying, “it is my opinion that we need some reforms to increase the population of the island allowing the Spaniards to bring as many Indians from other nonproductive islands” (p. 335). At the same time, Davila recognized the King's “property” in Hispaniola when he suggested, “Your highness, has on the island a thousand Indians. I would suggest that part of them be used for farming because it is less work than exploiting gold and it is more beneficial for the population and perpetuation of the island” (p. 336).

New sources of income. The bookkeeper, also showed his ability of identifying new sources of income for the Island and the King that would also reduce the hard labor of the natives. “The thing that is most destructive of the ships and is very costly and dangerous and makes the traveling dangerous is the loss of wood from the bruma [woodworm]. “There is a product that the Indians use to protect the wood that they call ‘copey.’ Copey is made from the fruit of a tree that they use to protect the wood of their canoes from the bruma. This would also water proof the ship and allow it to be like a fish going under water. “It is important to make a huge amount of brea [tar] from the copey to protect the ships. I would suggest that of the Indians that your Highness has, that you set apart a hundred of them with one Spaniard for making that product. I also suggest that copey be taken to La Casa de Contratacion de las Indias [House of Trade] to be used on the ships so the sailors can protect their ships. It can be sold for a good price and will be of more beneficial than to use the Indians to extract gold” (p. 332-347).

Another suggestion Davila made to the King of Spain was, “It is recommended that your Highness create one or two sugar factories with black slaves [from Africa]” (p. 336). Davila added, “with a hundred Indians, it is possible to create a sugar factory with great benefits and profit for the Island” (p. 340). Davila also suggested the creation of a saw mill, “on the borders of a river called Nicao there is a good site [to establish a saw mill] to bring wood to Santo Domingo by sea and at low cost” (p. 337). Davila, stressed his point, “it will be more profitable for your Highness than the mines and very useful for the population and buildings there” (p. 337).

Recapturing natives. Davila also recognized that because of the bad treatment of natives in Hispaniola, many of them ran away from their owners. He wrote, “One of the

problems that can be solved, is to avoid loss of natives in the forests and in unknown homes because this is where the natives died” (p. 337). This suggests that after 25 years of interaction between the Spaniards and the Tainos, the Tainos lost their skills for survival in the forest. A solution for this problem was well elaborated by Davila, “The reform that should be taken for the Indians who escape from their owners, and they will come back to serve them because your Highness will win in this, is the construction of a net [jail] in which to keep the Indians that are found. Anyone who turns in an Indian who is lost or escaped should be given 4 reals [money]. In addition, it is important to publicize the reform. So if a house or ranch has Indians that do not belong to them, the owner of that house or farm will give back the Indians plus one Indian who does belong to them. I suggest putting a person in each town to implement this” (p. 342-343).

Referring to the expected result of the implementation of his recapturing of natives proposal, Davila wrote, “This will be a very of great benefit to do: First, the soldiers (hunters) that each farmer or rancher has to have to capture escaped Indians will no longer be needed. Second, it will clear the conscience of everybody because they will not be using Indians that do not belong to them. The third benefit is that legal suits will be avoided since there are many of these problems on the island just regarding [ownership of] Indians. Fourth, it will be possible to extract more gold if each one has all of their own Indians. The fifth benefit, knowing these reforms, the Indians will recognize that they will not be transferred to different places and they will have only one owner to report to, and they will rest and will be content for longer times. All the Indians will have owners” (p. 343-344).

Implementation suggestions. Recognizing some of the problems with his proposal, Davila made many recommendations for implementing the proposal, “If a Spaniards sends an Indian from one place to another, when they do this they should give a letter or paper to the Indian that will say, ‘this Indian belongs to that person and is going to that place.’ It is very common to send an Indian from one place to another” (p. 344). Davila continued, “Because these natives are not used to communicating very well and they are very shy, there is another addition, on Sundays or events all the Indians usually go to different places to fish. On their way, some Spaniards may take them as prisoners because of the interest of receiving 4 reals [money], during these events or Sundays the Indians should not be arrested [by the Spaniards]” (p. 344).

Davila also recognized one of the main attributes of the natives of Hispaniola, “There is one condition among the Indians that will help greatly accomplish this [recapturing of natives]. It is that if an Indian who escapes from his owner is asked if they escaped, they do not deny that if it is true” (p. 344). “It is also important to establish an order with all the Indians who are absent or who have escaped from their owners so they cannot be in other places except serving their owners. In this manner your Highness has lost many of them and there are some Spaniards that have captured the Indians that escaped” (p. 340-341).

Davila suggested some radical changes in the approach to the economic subsistence of Hispaniola, from old mines to agricultural production. He wrote, “The things that will perpetuate the island are wheat, wine, and forage for the cattle” (p. 337), “cotton, sugar, canifistola” (p. 340), “and vineyards” (p. 341). It will be helpful to send farmers [from Spain]—each one can have an opinion of how the farming can be done.

Because if we loose the Indians there will not be enough Spaniards for the farming work. At the same time, it is more convenient for the Spaniards and the farmers because it will be of more interest and more profitable than to exploit gold” (p. 337-340).

Melting gold. Regarding the production of gold already in place in Hispaniola, Davila had something to add, “It will be better for the Spaniards during certain times of the year to melt gold that Indians are producing on the island [rather than sending the raw gold to Spain]” (p. 337). He added, when the Spaniards melt the gold in the mines rather than having the Indians transport it, they can more easily prevent the Indians from escaping (p. 346).

Some of the points in the proposal of Davila apparently were implemented in later years. For example, we know about that slaves were imported from Africa and a large sugar cane plantation was established. In fact, Hispaniola eventually became one of the main producers of sugar in the Americas.

The New Queen of Spain’s Solutions

The new Queen of Spain Juana de Castilla was aware of the problems on Hispaniola, she recognized the need for changes, but the only solutions that she proposed were the same solutions that had not worked in the past. Furthermore, the role of the Tainos in Hispaniola was never considered and their extermination was not alleviated. The Queen sent on December 9, 1518, *The information that the lawyer, Rodrigo de Figueroa, Judge of Residence on the Island of Hispanola should know, regarding the Indians and what he should do in this matter* (CDIA # 23, p. 332-353). The Queen started her document recognizing what many people at that time knew about the decimation of natives, “The first is, regarding the poor treatment of the Indians has

caused the diminishment of them. Regarding our experience we know that from the high number of them we have very few. And as we can clearly see, they are diminishing and they do not multiply or reproduce. We believe this is a huge problem and is damaging to us and to the land” (p. 333) She continued, “Some say that it is caused by the Spaniard's poor treatment of Indians that they own and their carelessness with them and also the hard work of extracting the gold and other things that require hard work. It is clear that this and other notorious things have been the cause of the diminishment of the Indians” (p. 333).

The Queen continued giving her view, according the information she received regarding the Tainos. She said, “Some have tried to suggest solutions. They say that Indians are not capable to live by themselves and governing themselves and they will never be able to live politically [having their own government]. There are others that say they are able to live politically and if they are able to do that, maybe they will not pay the tribute in gold that is imposed” (p. 333). She continued, “The ones who say that Indians are not capable, think that Indians will never be Christians or capable to know how to govern themselves and to live our religion and live in our way” (p. 333-334).

To illustrate this last point, the Queen tried to explain, “During the time of the governorship of Comindador of Alcantara [Ovando], one or two free chiefs were taken to determine if they were able to live as the Spaniards. And they were not capable of that. All of their inclination is laziness and no work but to do nothing but fish and eat. When they were taught the Christian doctrine, they forgot and went back to their old habits and ways of living. The Spaniards have seen that some of them who have been taught very

well and taken up the Spaniards customs have left their Spanish clothing and returned to follow their old ways” (p. 334).

The Queen continued: “The ones who say they [natives] are capable and that they will be capable say that the Indians should be free with no permits [completely free], governed by themselves and living freely in their towns with some priests that will teach them the Holy Catholic faith. In this manner they will conserve themselves and multiply and offer tribute as it is established. There are other ways. Spaniards can build towns for the Indians close to the Christian towns. In there [native towns] the priest will indoctrinate them, teach them, and govern them. They also can have salaried people as tutors that can be in charge of them and govern them and work for us. And all those things are spoken because of the poor care that the Spaniards took of the Indians they possess because the natives have diminished because of the hard labor that was imposed on them and the lack of maintenance of their essential needs” (p. 335).

Considering the natives as subjects, the Queen said, “The Indians should be well treated so that the ones who are alive will be conserved and multiply. And also so if they are capable of living by themselves politically and in order that they can have their freedom to live and order their lives and pay tribute as we command to our free subjects. If they are not able to do that as some say, it is better for their knowledge, salvation, conservation, and multiplication that they should be put in Christians towns and be governed by priests and other people that help them under their administration... and if it is necessary to use their labor, it should be in benefit for the Indians” (p. 337).

The Queen was also very specific about the instructions for the judge, Rodrigo de Figueroa , she commanded: “As soon as you get there, you should take the Indians

officially from the Spaniards that you know are treating the Indians poorly and they should keep those Indians on their farms and feed them but not use them for hard labor until it is decided if the conditions of the Indians improved. They should be well treated and have the things that they need and they should have moderate work” (p. 337-378).

The Queen also gave Figueroa some instructions regarding the preaching of Catholicism to the natives, “with the approval of the St. Geronimo priest, the Indians should be Christian to save to their souls. So they will be able to learn to live as reasonable political people and acquire good customs” (p. 337). The Queen added regarding the obligations of her Indian Subjects, “They [Indians] will not receive poor treatment or extortion or cruelties as has been done with them until now. We have determined that we should give them freedom. You should register those chiefs or Indians that may have the ability and capability to obtain this liberty. The natives should give us tribute because they are subjects and they owe us as King and Lord of that Land” (p. 340).

Regarding the tax system established at that time, the Queen made very specific orders about the obligation the natives had with the Kingdom of Spain, Again a contradiction: a command to treat the Indians well but they yet obligating them to pay taxes.

“It is our will that each married Indian pay us 3 pesos for him, and for each child or male person who lives in his house from 20 years and older. Because there are Indians who are not married of the same age [20 years old or older] they should also pay the same [3 pesos for each one of them]. In the same way, every Indian who is married should pay for the people or male children that they have under his group. For all the people under

the age of twenty and for all fifteen to twenty year olds, 1 pesos of gold each year.

The same amount should be paid for the chiefs. For all the people that are under their governorship, as has been established in the first and second items. We have not been informed about the things on the island. We do not know if the Indians will be able to pay this tribute. We do not know if this is a lot or little. You can determine by your judgment and inform us if the tribute is right or too much. And you can charge them more if they are able to pay” (p.340-341).

The Queen was also aware of the illegal trade of peaceful natives on Hispaniola. She commanded with regard to that, “In the same way I have been informed that many Indians have been brought to Hispaniola from other islands as slaves even though they are not [even though they were not Caribbeans who were slaves]. It is my will to clarify this situation. To know who are and should be slaves and the island where they come from, I command you to give me a complete report about it. According to that information, you should make justice. The Spaniards have brought Indians from the firm land [Venezuela, Panama] and other islands and against the Indians’ will to come. This has caused much damage to the Indians and many struggles. I command you not to [force or] bribe Indians that are not declared as Caribbeans [to come to Hispaniola] against their will from the islands” (p. 342-343).

The Queen went farther in her instruction regarding Hispaniola, recognizing the incivility of some Spaniards, she wrote, “I have been notified that the Dominican priests in the coast of the island were converting and preaching the chief and Indians of Hispanola. The priest saw many people (Spaniards) in their ships and carabels searching for pearls. They are also looking for Indians and do other damage and set a bad example

to the Indians. In consequence the preaching and doctrine of the priest have no fruit for this reason” (p. 349).

This document from Queen Juana de Castilla is very illustrative of the situation of native people in Hispaniola and the surrounding islands. It supports the work of Bartolome de Las Casas, who is highly criticized by modern historians. It is important to emphasize the importance of this work as complementary of the work done by other historians, who are interested in setting the record of this period of time during the “Spanish Conquest” straight.

A Letter to the King Charles V from the Geronmyte Priests

Apparently the Geronmytes were very concerned about the fate of the Tainos as expressed in the letter, *To the Emperor Charles V.—The Geronmytes Priest from Santo Domingo* on January 18, 1518 (CDIA # 1, p. 298-304), “Your Highness...it will be of benefit... for the Indians, your subjects, if they will be helped and relieved from work, so they can take care of their bodies and multiply. In the same way we beg for the poor Indians so they may live and not disappear. It is impossible that in no manner to return those who we take from the gentlemen who are in the kingdom. We took the Indians from them, because they were the worst treated, because they were in hands of bosses.”

Obviously, all the documents sent by the crown, did not have effect on the changes needed for preserving the Tainos people of Hispaniola, The priests asked: “in the same manner we implored...about these poor Indians, that in any manner they should not be placed with tyrant gentlemen who live in these Kingdoms” (p. 299). Our Highness...should know that by the time the Castellians came in this Island, there were millions and hundred of thousands of Indians and because of our sins, in the short period

of time we have been here, we found that they are very few, as much is the fruit remaining on a tree after harvest” (p. 300). Four days later, they wrote another letter, this time the letter contained a more detailed information about the Tainos in Hispaniola.

Second Letter from the Geronmytes

The next document is one of the most complete with respect to my thesis. It contains very important information, as well as a short summary of the events that occurred during the period of 25 years of relations between Columbus and the original people of Hispaniola, the Tainos. We know that the population of Hispaniola was already decimated, as the new focus of the Island was in a period of transition from the gold mines to agricultural production. The document is called, *To the illustrious Monsieur de Xevres, bachelor Cuaco. From Santo Domingo, Hispaniola Island, on January 22, 1518* (CDIA # 1, 304-332). The document starts by informing the King about the importance of the Tainos in regard to the crown, “having a lack of Indians, we have lack in all, lack in the profit for your Highness, because there won’t be anyone who will extract gold,”...they stress their point, “lack of population on the land and farms,” and as a consequence, the lost of “very abundant and fertile land” (p. 305).

The Geronmytes continued giving a short history of the Island, apparently they had high regard for Columbus’ father, Christopher whom, “in truth had good concern about the good treatment of the Indians.” It is very difficult to understand this statement, since we know that under Columbus’ command many atrocities were committed in Hispaniola. The priest went farther in Columbus’ defense, explaining that Columbus was “a good Christian and since he did not allow those with him to use their free appetites

(corruption), they insurrected against him,...and on this occasion your Highness sent Commendador Bobadilla” (p. 305), to replace Columbus.

With the arrival of Comendador Bobadilla, the priests continued writing, “here there were much chaos, many gangs,...and depopulation of neighbors, and death of Indians,..” We know that Commendador Bobadilla only ruled in Hispaniola for 2 years and on his return trip, he drowned along with other 25 ships. In the view of the Geronmytes, it was a punishment from “the judgments of God” (p. 306). The governorship of Bobadilla started in 1500 and ended with the arrival of Fransisco Nicolas de Ovando, Commendador de Lares on 1502.

Ovando arrived in Hispaniola with 2,500 followers, it was the biggest arrival of people to the Island and it is difficult to deny that it caused more struggles with the relationship between the Spaniards and the Tainos people of Hispaniola. The Geronmyte priests summarized the Ovando’s period as follows, “After him [Bobadilla] another commendador arrived, he was called Commendador of Lares (Ovando), he was a proud man although he had some good qualities. He sent people to Higuey, were he killed, by the hand of his servant, Juan de Esquivel, from Seville, seven or eight thousand Indians, understanding that these land [people]) wanted to arise [against the Spaniards] and they [Indians] were naked people and one Christian with one sword is enough for two hundred Indians” (p.306-307). Besides the manslaughter on Higey, the priests continued, “He commanded another huge manslaughter and cruelty in the land of Jaragua (Xaragua), that...was governed by a great lady called Anacaona, with all her principal Caciques...He (Ovando) gave Indians to people and took from them from others and

gave them (Indians) to his servants and others, and on this transferring many of them died” (p. 307).

After Ovando’s government, Diego Columbus became the governor of Hispaniola, the Geronmytes wrote about the period, “he was more concerned because he wanted to give Indians to married people that were permanent on the island. However, due to the transfer many of those given by Commendador de Lares (Ovando) who were taken, also some Indians died” (p. 307). During this period of time because of the scarcity of natives, many were transferred from one place to the other, some times covering immense distances and causing some lost of life. The Geronmytes wrote, “the Indians that were of the province of Higüey were taken to Xaragua and La Cabana, places that were far from Higüey (one hundred leguas)” (p. 309). The Geronmytes added that because of the change, it caused the lost of life, because, “water,..cold,..immense work and fatigue caused by the bad treatment” (p. 310).

Population information. The Geronmytes again wrote about the original population in Hispaniola, “it was found that on this Hispaniola Island there were one million one hundred and thirty thousand Indians, now there are not nearly eleven thousand...and it is believed what will happen three or four years from now is that there won’t be none of them [Indians] if we do not find solutions” (p. 310).

One interesting piece of information I found in this document, is the description given by the Geronmytes regarding the “*requerimiento* that was carried for the obedience to the Catholic King; it was given by a public notary, who read the said *requerimiento*...it was read in the Spanish language, to the Caciques and Indians not speaking Spanish, did not understand, and because it was read from a long distance, even if they knew the

language they weren't able to hear. If they heard something, it was believed that they [Spaniards] were asking for gold and if they [Indians] were not able to give it to them, they were going to be burned as with other Caciques in the past and his brothers, would come at night to their houses, stealing, bringing with them their dogs, and taking them as slaves" (p. 317). This vivid description provided by the Geronmytes, supports the writings of Bartolome de Las Casas.

In this same document, Cuaco, [a judge] gave a very descriptive account of the struggle Christopher Columbus had in Jamaica, where he stayed for a year waiting to be transported back to Spain after losing his ship in his last trip to the Americas. According to Cuaco, the natives were tired of sharing their food supplies with the foreigners, when it was evident that the natives ignored the needs of Columbus and his men, Columbus tried to deceive them. Columbus knew about an eclipse that was going to happen shortly, so he talked with them, telling that "God was very upset with them (Indians) because their persecution of the Christians caused anguish and fatigue to them (Spaniards) and that in two days, he (Columbus) announced the moon was going to turn black." Interestingly, it seems that Columbus' announcement was taken seriously, because we read, "The Indians waited the said two days to see the miracle...and the Admiral and his men had not ate much as the past...days. When the eclipse come to pass, immediately they (Indians) believed what the Admiral told them and they brought food and supplies and everything that was necessary to him (Columbus) and his men" (p.222).

It is also interesting to learn about the legal problems among the people of Hispaniola at that time, Cuaco being a Judge wrote, "I found by the time I arrived more

than four hundred suits delayed...and I have given since I am here, more than six hundred verdicts” (p. 325). After the descriptive narrative information about the Spaniards and Indians situation in Hispaniola, Judge Cuaco offered some solutions, “There is a need for introducing population to this land from all part of the world, it can be given licenses for doing that, except the Moros (Arabics), Jews and reconciled...because they are bad people, rebellious and problematic for towns and communities” (p. 328).

Cuaco added, “There is need that the Caribes on the firm land...should brought as slaves to this island...”(p. 328). It was not the first of such suggestions. Thus, in the process, many Caribbean were peacefully brought to Hispaniola and Spain sold as slaves. Some of the islands around Hispaniola were left depopulated as their inhabitants were taken for hard labor. Cuaco asked the King of Spain: “is there is a need,...for good reason, that the many islands that are uninhabited or lost or with a few people be given to the Castellians from the armies...with the condition that they (Castillians) populate them (Islands). Because if we don’t do that, we won’t receive any benefits, because those Islands do not have gold, it is possible to have sugar farms, cotton, canastifostola, cattle and other things of high price” (p. 329).

Judge Cuaco pursued as many others did, the subsistence of the Indians as a base for their utilization. It was contradictory desire since, as we know, it was not possible to expect the good treatment of native at the same time they were used as the only hand of labor for every task on Hispaniola. It proved the end of the Tainos people. Only one last rebellion delayed their end, when Enriquillo, a Christian converted Indian leader, lead his people in the last stand against the Spaniards. Time proved that the rebellion was not

enough to save the Tainos of Hispaniola and a few years following 1518, they were reported extinct.

Summary

This chapter describes the conflicts between the royalty of Spain and the Columbus family. Diego Colon was removed from his position but returned to power after five years when King Ferdinand died. Diego was a better governor than his father, he supported the assimilation of the Tainos, the conversion to Christianity, and he prosecuted those who committed injustices against Natives. Unfortunately, the Tainos population by this time was already in serious decline. Davila's suggestions and recommendations as well as those of the Geronymite priests provided a great deal of information that explains the situation of the Tainos people.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This paper reviews the history of the Tainos people on the island of Hispaniola during the period of time between 1492 and 1524. It describes what we already know and shows how the information I found and translated from the Spanish government documents, *Documentos Ineditos de las Indias* [Documents ___ of the Indies], traditionally abbreviated as (CDIA) written in Castillian Spanish integrates with that which is already known. This final chapter summarizes and presents the major conclusions of this paper in terms of the contributions that the information taken from the CDIA documents make to understanding the settlement of Hispaniola during 1492-1524.

General Findings

Three general and three specific themes presented themselves in reviewing the CDIA documents. The general themes included: (a) the contributions of the Tainos people to the economy of Hispaniola, (b) the power, position, and failures of Christopher Columbus and (c) the cultural aspects, language and communication barriers.

The Contributions of the Tainos to the Initial Settlement of Hispaniola

Throughout the CDIA documents, there were many references to the Tainos people in terms of their treatment and position as laborers. The CDIA documents provided specific examples of how the efforts of the Tainos helped to establish the colony of Hispaniola and sustain its economy. In earlier times, many historians failed to

recognize the fact that the survival of the colony in the early years depended greatly on the Tainos.

The Power, Position and Failures of Christopher Columbus

Details of Columbus' power, positions and his many failures came to light in reading the actual CDIA documents. The documents that the monarchy signed before departing on his first voyage gave Christopher Columbus and his heirs power and position that the monarchy was never be able to change. Later CDIA documents also confirmed the economic interests that the Columbus family maintained in Hispaniola.

The CDIA documents provided much information about Columbus' struggle to govern Hispaniola and his resulting failures. From the beginning Columbus worried about winning the continued support and approval of the King and Queen of Spain, left his crew on La Navidad without adequate supervision, raced with Martin Pinzon back to Spain, and after arriving, exaggerated the amount of gold available on Hispaniola. Another example illustrates Columbus' failures as well. During his second voyage, Columbus brought 1,500 men to Hispaniola. After a short time, the men rebelled against Columbus the men suffered climate related diseases, and failed to find the expected gold. Basically, Columbus' skills were those of an adventurer and not those of a colonizer, and this situation obviously contributed to the downfall of the Tainos people.

Language and Communication Barriers

Historians have for the most part, ignored the importance of language as a very obvious obstacle to establishing necessary communication between the Spaniards and the Natives. The CDIA documents provided important information about this barrier

specifically in relation to the conversion of the Tainos to Christianity. That is, the lack of interpreters was mentioned in several of the government documents. We can also surmise that Christopher Columbus, himself an Italian, most likely fell short in his command of the Spanish language. This was confirmed by Ramon Menendez Pidal, (1968) in his book, *The Language of Christopher Columbus*. In his book, Pidal mentioned that Las Casas, said that Columbus did not know Spanish very well. This suggests that the barrier of communication not only extended from Columbus to the Tainos but also between Christopher Columbus and his own men.

Specific Findings

The specific findings from my review of the government documents focused on the nature of the Spanish monarchy and the ineffective attempts at leadership, the specific problems and solutions provided by Davila to deal with the resulting issues that the monarchy faced, and the support for the position and writings of Bartholme de las Casas.

The Ineffective Nature of the Spanish Monarchy

The economy of Hispaniola required a high degree of physical labor. The King and Queen faced a dilemma of the duality of defending the Tainos and sustaining the colonization efforts. Historians describe the monarchy of Spain as being weak, issuing legal mandates, but not having the political power or adequate resources to implement the mandates. The following subsections illustrate several major areas of ineffectiveness.

The Monarchy Sends A Small Army To Conquer Hispaniola

Upon his return from his first voyage, Christopher Columbus requested that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela supply him with a small army of fifty men to “conquer” the

Island. The King and Queen granted this request. This is a little known or discussed fact that illustrates the misguided assessment and position of attempts to settle Hispaniola.

The Monarchy's Position On Slavery

A review of the CDIA documents revealed that, contrary to what most historians report, Queen Isabela initially supported slavery and then almost immediately officially turned against it. She and King Ferdinand prohibited slavery but the prohibition was ignored and not just with the Caribbean slaves. This was especially evident in the document that was labeled as a "secret" document in which the monarchy directed that towns be built to congregate the Taïos to be near the mines.

There were many instances, furthermore, when slaves were sold in Spain even after Columbus' request to sell slaves was officially denied. This is a primary example of how the monarchy failed to enforce its own directives. It is evident that the monarchy did not enforce or implement its own directives. Floyd, (1973) succinctly explained the situation regarding the colonization, indicating that a "weak monarchy directed its haphazard course" (p. 232).

Criminals Sent To Settle Hispaniola

Like other colonization efforts, the monarchy of Spain in 1497 sent criminals to settle Hispaniola. This information, discovered through translating the CDIA documents, helps to explain the increasingly poor treatment and rapid deterioration of the Tainos people.

The Monarchy Created An Institution To Exploit Hispaniola

When Hispaniola started to produce some gold and other goods for export to Spain in 1503, the monarchy established a mechanism to control the importation and exportation of goods. Thus, in the CDIA documents we learned that the crown established the, *Casa de Contratacion* [House of Contracts]. This official entity was created for the administration and exploitation of goods from Hispaniola. While this concept of exploitation may be presented by historians, the CDIA documents provided specific evidence of support.

Attempts to convert and assimilate the Tainos

The CDIA documents provided several examples of the Spanish efforts to convert and assimilate the Tainos people. However, the CDIA documents also made clear the fact that conversion and assimilation efforts were unsuccessful at least until much later in the colonization process. Many Tainos people during the early years chose suicide over assimilation.

Davila's Concerns and Recommendations

Davila provided a very detailed report in the CDIA documents to the monarchy of the issues facing the Tainos in the year 1518. This report has been omitted from the current literature reviewed to date, but lends much detail regarding the status of the Tainos. Davila also provided many possible recommendations for improving the well-being of the Tainos, the settlement of Hispaniola, and the economic interests of Spain. It appears that some of his economic recommendations such as the creation of sugar factories were implemented.

The Authenticity of the Writings of Bartholme de las Casas

Many historians question the authenticity of Las Casas' reports regarding such things as the population of Hispaniola and the treatment of Tainos people. The CDIA documents provided support for much of the writings of Las Casas. For example, many historians report that Las Casas inflated the original figures describing the population of Hispaniola but some CDIA documents also give higher estimates. Furthermore, in terms of the poor treatment of the Tainos, the CDIA documents described the writings of others such as the letters from Davila and the Geronomyte priests whose reports corroborated those of Las Casas. The point is that no one knows with certainty what the population of Hispaniola was, thus all comments are estimates. Las Casas may have been incorrect in his estimates of the total population but his accounts of the treatment of the Tainos were more likely to be correct.

Discussion

After a little more than thirty years of involvement with the Spaniards, unfortunately the Tainos by 1524 according to most historians, almost completely disappeared. The conquest period as Rouse (1992:165) describes it "was plagued by a conflict between the crown's ideal of converting the Indians to Christianity and assimilating them into Spanish culture and the colonists' belief that they had to exploit the Indians in order to make a decent living. The colonists' belief prevailed, hastening the decline of the Tainos."

Many revisionist historians blame the conquistadors in general and Columbus specifically for the genocide of the Tainos people. However, according to Rouse, "this

event resulted from circumstance: all the parties to the event had to adapt to the natural, cultural, and social conditions in which they lived” (Rouse, 1992: 138-139).

By translating these Spanish government documents into English and synthesizing the information, this paper reveals and adds new information as well as providing rich detail that confirms and supports the findings and reports of current historians.

The eight major contributions of this paper include:

1. Providing information that was not available in English.
2. The period 1492 -1525 contains 514 government documents. I read 360 and used 56 of them that contained in my view, the most important information regarding the relations between the Tainos and the Spaniards.
3. The documents also contained information about such things as the Spanish government, distribution of land, economic challenges, Spanish population numbers, internal problems in the Span, and the establishment of towns on Hispaniola. This information provides rich background information.
4. The first 30 years from 1492-1524 in my view are very important because these were the years when the Spaniards acquired the skills that facilitated them in reaching the continent and establishing themselves, their economic systems, and the relationship with the Tainos people.
5. This paper focused on information from primary sources, a very important tool in writing history. Most likely, historians who are not fluent in Castilian Spanish avoid Spanish documents.

6. Most of the translated accounts are written in the first person, meaning the people that actual observed the events that they described. This lends credibility to the writings.
7. Las Casas is not the only primary “historian” who compiled information of the period between 1492 ad 1524. Las Casas’ accounts agree with those described in the CDIA documents
8. My recommendation based on the conclusions of this paper is that other primary source documents of 1492–1524 period such as, *The Life of Christopher Columbus*, written Columbus’ son Fernando and the, *Account of Antiquities of the Indians*, written by Fray Ramon Pane, should be reviewed and used as primary sources of information. These document are available in English. Use of these historical accounts will more accurately represent the Tainos people and their contributions to the settling of the Americas.

The legacy of Christopher Columbus has been viewed as one of progress and acculturation all around the world. However, as popular accounts of the world history have for the most part ignored the contributions of Native people to the establishment of the first settlements in the Americas. Many of these Natives lost their lives as a consequence of the conquests. Their labor, food supplies, views of the environment, government systems, and natural resources influenced Columbus in his time. The legacy of the contributions of Native people to the world, in my opinion, far exceeds those of an adventurer named Christopher Columbus.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although most of the government documents of this period are compiled in two CDIA volumes (#30 and 31). During my review, I found several additional documents in other CDIA volumes as well. For example, CDIA # 32, have also a great deal of information about that period. Further investigation into these and other collections of government documents may reveal additional new and confirmatory information. These documents may prove worthy of also being translated so that English speaking people and others may access this information. Future research should put more emphasis on primary sources written in English and in Spanish.