

ANTÓN ZAPE, “UN NEGRO DE MUCHO PRECIO”: *Seeking Freedom and Honor Through Royal Service in Sixteenth-Century Panama*

In 1584, Antón Zape, a Black enslaved African originally from Sierra Leone, received his manumission letter after a long trajectory of military service to the Spanish Crown. Although his enslaver was reluctant to grant him freedom, the Audiencia de Panama considered Antón’s services worthy of a royal grace. The president of the Audiencia himself intervened by writing to King Philip II to force his enslaver to grant Antón the manumission he deserved. The king heard the Audiencia’s recommendation and granted Antón freedom along with a substantial annual pension of 50 gold pesos to live according to his *calidad* (“quality,” but better translated as status). Philip II ordered Antón’s former enslaver to pay him this annual pension and to supervise the correct distribution of the stipend for his entire life; until Antón’s death, his enslaver’s descendants were required to fulfill the duty of paying him his annual pension. Because the pension was financed by Antón’s past enslaver, it subverted the enslaved person–enslaver relation, requiring the enslaver’s lifetime commitment to his former enslaved person. In addition to freedom and a pension, Antón was granted the privilege of bearing arms, signifying a public and official royal sanction of honor and *calidad*.¹

Using letters, *memoriales*, and other legal and administrative documents from the Audiencia of Panama, this article explores Antón Zape’s life in sixteenth-century Panama at the service of the Spanish king, where he courageously fought against English corsairs and Maroons during the Second Bayano War (1572–1582). He soon distinguished himself as the bravest soldier in the Spanish Panamanian army

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1. Archivo General de Indias, (A.G.I.), Panama, 237, lib. 12, ff. 12.v-13. r. A.G.I. Panama, 237, lib. 12, f. 23.r.

and was promoted to the military rank of captain. Building upon a rich historiography of Black experiences in the colonial Americas, I argue that, despite his Blackness and status as an enslaved person, Antón was not deprived of opportunities for social advancement.² He intelligently navigated the legal and social cosmos of Panamanian colonial society and exploited all opportunities he had available to achieve his own objectives. His case demonstrates that Blackness was not necessarily perceived as a negative attribute, but could be fully compatible with Iberian ideas of citizenship, subjecthood, honor, and *calidad*. This positive conception of Africanness and Blackness was more noticeable in the localized setting of military service, especially during Spanish campaigns of imperial expansion and defense.³ As with many other people of African descent, Antón emerged as a critical facilitator of Spanish sovereignty. Against all odds, he liberated himself from the bond of slavery and remade his image as an honored individual, praised by the imperial administration, which recognized him as a “prized” (*de mucho precio*) Black Spaniard.

Documentary traces informing Antón Zape’s lived experience in the Spanish Americas come from his interaction with the imperial administration. Since Antón’s *memoriales* and petition letters no longer remain in the colonial archive, what we know about his life is inevitably mediated by multiple actors, interests, and powers external to Antón’s own experience. The silences of the archive, numerous documentary gaps, and the fragmentation of the documentation requires a cross-examination of an array of legal and administrative documents produced by Antón’s enslaver and imperial officers to circumvent layers of colonial subjugation.⁴ Following innovative methodologies that subvert the power of colonial discourses implemented by scholars of slavery, women, and race, I carefully consult documents produced by the administration focusing on

2. Among the vast and rich historiography, see: Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall, *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009); Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Ben Vinson III, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: African, Maas and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2009); Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2005); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1996); Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Jane G. Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999).

3. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Elena A. Schneider, *The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). Manuel Olmedo, “In Search of the Black Fencer: Race and Martial Arts Discourse in Early Modern Iberia,” in *Trajectories of Empire: Transhispanic Reflections on the African Diaspora*, ed. Jerome Branche, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2022), 46-78.

4. Kathryn J. McKnight and Leo J. Garofalo, “Recovering Afro-Latino Voices from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World,” in *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1550-1812*, eds. Kathryn J. McKnight and Leo J. Garofalo, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), IX-XXII. Cassander L. Smith, Nicholas R. Jones, Miles P. Grier, *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies: A Critical Anthology*, (London: Palgrave, 2018), 1-15.

Antón’s life and struggle to obtain freedom and honor. I center his Black experience to evidence instances of his “soul value” refracted in these sources.⁵

Antón’s case reconsiders the role and position of Afro-descendants in Iberian colonial society, and the multiple lived experiences of people of African descent whose lives were not universally mediated by the indelible stigma of slavery. On the contrary, as Antón did, many Afro-descendants managed to negotiate their status and rights with the imperial administration for their services in maintaining Spanish sovereignty. Antón’s decision to remain loyal to the Spanish king and his determination to follow the legal path to manumission instead of escaping Spanish authority and joining Maroon forces reveals his desire to achieve freedom without rejecting the duties and obligations tied to colonial notions of citizenship and rightful vassalage that served as a “path to political personhood and belonging” to the civic community of the kingdom.⁶

Antón’s case illuminates the many different strategies and paths people of African descent followed to live their own lives and achieve their own goals under imperialism. It informs Afro-descendants self-perceptions in society, as Antón saw himself as a valuable member of society who deserved to be treated and rewarded as such. By receiving a royal-sponsored manumission, a substantial economic pension, and the right to bear arms, Antón enjoyed perks far superior to those generally enjoyed by the minority Iberian elite. He saw that some former enslaved people were able to overcome the limitations imposed by racial ideology and break the bond of “permanent gratitude” that tied them to their former enslavers after manumission.⁷ Indeed, Antón subverted the system by getting the Crown to force his former owner to manumit him and then to profess life-long “gratitude” to his former enslaved person through an honorary pension. Antón’s case more broadly contributes to our understanding of the critical role of Afro-descendants in the defense of the Spanish imperial project in critical moments of instability, such as the Maroon revolt in Panama. As Antón did, many Afro-

5. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015). Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016). Daina Ramey Berry, “Soul values and American slavery,” *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 42, 2, (2021): 201-218.

6. David A. Sartorius, *Ever Faithful*, 10. Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 1-15. Manumission was understood as a “civic birth” in which slaves acquired their status as free men under the rightful vassalage of the Spanish monarch. Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 161, 1-17; 64-94: 119-141. Norah L. Gharala, *Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), 5, 1-22. Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulatos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 3-35, 81-123. María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670-1780*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 285-313, 314-329.

7. María Elena Martínez, “The Black Blood of New Spain: Limpieza de Sangre, Racial Violence and Gendered Power in Early Colonial Mexico,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, vol. 61, 3, (2004): 479-529.

descendants risked their lives in loyal service of the Spanish Crown, becoming pivotal facilitators of imperial expansionism. Antón's choices further reveal why many African descendants vowed loyalty to the king rather than flee Spanish subjugation.⁸ They reveal that Afro-descendants maintained a vast understanding of the Spanish legal system founded upon their beliefs in the Spanish empire as a commonwealth.⁹ More importantly, it reveals the Crown's need to reward and integrate any meritorious vassals regardless of their racial, ethnic, and social origin to maintain its *symbolic* global power. Recovering one of many Black loyalists' actions enriches the ongoing conversation about the multiple experiences of people of African descent in the Spanish empire and their pivotal role in the construction of Iberian society as Black Spaniards who enjoyed *calidad*, public reputation, old Christian ancestry, citizenship, and *naturaleza* (nativeness) as legitimate status as vassals of the king of Spain.¹⁰

“UN NEGRO DE MUCHO PRECIO”: ANTÓN ZAPE AT THE SERVICE OF THE SPANISH MONARCH IN PANAMA

Although documents simply refer to Antón as a *Negro* (Black person) and none indicate his birthplace, his last name informs his ethnic and regional origin. Iberian traffickers were especially careful in detailing the background of West Central Africans and Upper Guineans, who usually appear in documents classified by their ethnolinguistic diversity, distinct from other sub-Saharan Africans.¹¹ Antón's last name “Zape” referred to his ethnic origin, indicating belonging to the most common Upper Guinean groups among the enslaved population in the Spanish colonial Americas.¹² His cognomen reveals that he was originally from the Senegambian coast, specifically from the vast territory known by Iberians as “the rivers of Guinea,” which included the regions of the modern-day Upper Guinea coast,

8. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-14.

9. Marcela Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 15-14. John L. Phelan, *The People and the King: The Comunero Revolution in Colombia* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1978). Miguel Dantas da Cruz, *Petitioning in the Atlantic World, 1500–1840: Empires, Revolutions and Social Movements*, (Berlin: Springer, 2022), 1-20.

10. Chloe Ireton, “They Are Blacks of the Caste of Black Christians”: Old Christian Black Blood in the Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Iberian Atlantic,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 97, 4, (2017): 579–612. Jorge E. Delgadillo, “The Workings of Calidad: Honor, Governance, and Social Hierarchies in the Corporations of the Spanish Empire,” *The Americas*, vol. 76, 2, (2019): 215-239. Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007). Juan Manuel Ramirez, “Sowing Wheat and Other Merits: The First Black Conquistador of the Mexican Field,” *Hispanic Review*, vol. 91, 2, (2023): 197-219.

11. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 25.

12. Nicole Von Germeten, “Black Botherhoods in Mexico City,” in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, eds. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 248-268.

Senegambia, and Sierra Leone.¹³ In *De Instauranda Aethiopum salute*, the Spanish Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval (1577–1652) indicates that the *Zape* people were originally from Sierra Leone. They comprised several ethnic divisions, including the *Cooli*, *Limba*, *Baca*, *Lindagozo*, *Zozo*, *Pelicoya*, *Baga*, and *Boloncho*.¹⁴

The *Zape* (also spelled *Çape* or *Sape*)¹⁵ did not have their own kingdom, but rather a stateless, local governing community with a political organization based on small units that had established trade and diplomatic relations with other communities such as the *Biafara*.¹⁶ Since the late fifteenth century, Iberian traders had trafficked Upper Guineans and transported them from the Senegambian coast to the Americas.¹⁷ The enslavement of *Zapes* increased due to mid-sixteenth-century conflicts with *Mane* and *Mande* people who migrated from the interior to *Zape* lands.¹⁸ Portuguese traders leveraged this military struggle to purchase war captives and prisoners, employing the Law of Nations and the Just War arguments.¹⁹ The height of *Zape* enslavement in the Americas occurred from the early sixteenth century to 1580, when the Portuguese had already founded the colony of Angola. Luanda (1575) became the main port for the transatlantic slave trade fueled by economic and diplomatic relations with West African elites.²⁰ By the 1540s many enslaved *Zape* people were taken to the circum-Caribbean, especially Panama, Guatemala, and Colombia.²¹ However, decades earlier, *Zapes* were already in the Spanish

13. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 21.

14. About Sandoval and his writings on the religious conversion of the enslaved African population in colonial Cartagena and the prominent role that Afro-descendants played as translators of Christian doctrine, see: Larissa Brewer-Garcia, *Beyond Babel: Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Alonso de Sandoval, *Treatise on Slavery: Selections from De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute*, (London: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 196.

15. In fact, Antón appears in Spanish documentation as Antón Zape, Antón Çape, and Antón Sape. The unstable spelling criteria by the imperial administrations pose an added difficulty in trying to find documentation on people of non-Spanish ancestry.

16. Nicole Von Germeten, “Juan Roque’s Donation of a House to the Zape Confraternity, Mexico City, 1623,” in *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1500-1812*, eds. Kathryn Joy McKnight, Leo J. Garofalo, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 83-105.

17. John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 127-158.

18. Nicole Von Germeten, “Black Brotherhoods,” 248-268. Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 62.

19. Herman L. Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Chloe Ireton, “Black Africans’ Freedom Litigation Suits to Define Just War and Just Slavery in the Early Spanish Empire,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 73, 4, (2020):1277-1319.

20. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 68-103. John Iliffe, *Africans*, 132. Hervert S. Klein, *The Atlantic*, 17-48. John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43-98.

21. Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Caribbean, where they became critical facilitators of Spanish imperialism and contributed economically, socially, and militarily to colonial development.²²

Although the documentation does not specify when Antón arrived in the Americas or when he began serving captain Ortega Valencia, his enslaver's *memoriales* suggest that Antón was already in Panama around 1550. Ortega, a native of Seville, arrived in Panama around 1540. He probably bought Antón in Panama in the 1550s.²³ Antón was certainly serving Ortega by the 1560s, and was fully active and fighting for the Spanish king throughout the Second Bayano War (1572–1582).²⁴ Between 1567 and 1568, Ortega Valencia participated in the expedition that led to the encounter with the Solomon Islands in the Pacific.²⁵ Ortega stated in his 1570 proof of merits that some of the 600 men that participated in the expedition were his own enslaved people.²⁶ Although the document does not mention the name of any particular individual, it is likely that Antón was among these enslaved Africans that came with him since Ortega financed the expedition himself and brought his personal enslaved people to act as auxiliaries.²⁷ Although these unknown enslaved Africans received no public recognition or reward for their involvement, they served in the exploration of the Solomon Islands as rightful Black conquistadors, ubiquitous and critical for Spanish invasion campaigns in the Americas.²⁸ Antón's military and exploratory mission may have given him his first platform to demonstrate his industry, courage, and loyalty to both his enslaver and the Crown. His experience must have played a decisive role in Ortega's decision to appoint him captain of a military unit during the Second Bayano War. Ortega likely sought to profit from his decision to appoint Antón as a military officer. He affirmed in his 1593 proof of merits that he was responsible for recruiting and funding the military salaries and equipment for his soldiers during the war.²⁹ Therefore, by appointing Antón as captain, Ortega was able to run a more affordable campaign since Antón

22. In Havana the *Zapes* represented almost 10% of the African population up to 1595. Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 105. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 5-19.

23. A.G.I. Panamá, 61, N.44.

24. A.G.I. Panamá, 42, N.21. A rich collection of archival documents from the A.G.I regarding the Bayano Wars, in Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons in Sixteenth-Century Panama: A History in Documents*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021).

25. María del Carmen Mena García, *La Sociedad de Panamá en el siglo XVI*, (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1984), 266-267. A.G.I. Audiencia de Panamá, 13, R.8, N.15. A.G.I. Patronato, 135, N.1, R.3.

26. A.G.I. Panamá, 61, N.44.

27. A.G.I. Patronato, 135, N.1, R.3.

28. Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *The Americas*, Vol. 57, 2, (2000): 171-205. Matthew Restall, *The Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 44-63. Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Jane G. Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). Juan Manuel Ramirez, "Sowing Wheat," 197-219.

29. A.G.I. Patronato, 135, N.1, R.3. Ortega sent multiple letters requesting personnel, equipment, and funding for the Second Bayano War. A.G.I. Panama, 229, lib. 1, ff. 56.r-56.v.

would not have received a salary as an enslaved person of Ortega. In a letter dated June 1579, Ortega complained about the inefficiency of the military captains, even claiming that it was difficult for him to fill all the military posts under his general command to keep the cost of the war down.³⁰ However, Antón’s appointment suggests that his enslaver was fully confident in his loyalty and bravery, and that he believed Antón had sufficient military skills to hold a captaincy.

In the early 1570s, Ortega held several positions of authority in Panama City and Nombre de Dios, including the post of *regidor*, *Alguacil Mayor*, and *Contador*. He also served as *Factor* and *Veedor* of Tierra Firme, giving him the power to oversee both commercial and military affairs in the region.³¹ These positions were closely linked to the importation of enslaved Africans to Panama. Ortega might have even used his power to purchase enslaved Africans for his household and economic transactions. He had extensive connections with slave ports and was personally known by some Maroons, especially principal leaders.³² In 1571, Antón Zape traveled to Spain with Pedro Ortega Valencia. The *Cabildo* of Nombre de Dios requested that Ortega inform the king about the situation and solicit additional personnel and resources to properly address the Maroon conflict.³³

In April 1572, Ortega requested a license from the Casa de la Contratación to travel from Spain to Panama with Antón and two other enslaved Africans after meeting with the Council of the Indies.³⁴ By July the Casa de la Contratación had issued them a travel license to return to Panama.³⁵ They headed to Nombre de Dios, where they found a city devastated by the recent English attack. In July of 1572, while they were in Spain, English and Maroon forces pillaged Nombre de Dios, causing its subsequent depopulation and decline.³⁶ For Antón, who resided partly between Nombre de Dios and Panama City, this event may have had a profound impact on him, considering his fervent determination to defeat the English forces. Nombre de Dios was one of the main ports of the Spanish treasure fleet, where convoys stored provisions before departing for Seville. The

30. A.G.I. Patronato, 234, R. 5, ff. 83-92. Letter transcribed in Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 173-177.

31. María del Carmen Mena, *La Sociedad de Panamá*, 223, 257, 267-268.

32. Letter of Pedro Ortega to the Crown, dated June 14, 1579, in Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 173-177.

33. Letter of the *Cabildo* of Nombre de Dios to the Crown, dated May 25, 1571. A.G.I. Panama, 30, N. 12.

34. A.G.I. Panamá, 236, lib. 10, f. 277.r.

35. A.G.I. Panamá, 236, lib. 10, f. 300.v.

36. Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 36-28. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones de Panamá: la forja de una identidad afroamericana en el siglo XVI*, (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2009), 126.

city was connected to Panama City and the port of Callao in Peru by the “Camino Real.”³⁷ Antón typically traveled this road when he visited his wife in Panama City, where she served a Spanish enslaver.³⁸ Antón probably saw his wife quite frequently considering that Ortega held government positions in both Nombre de Dios and Panama City from the early 1560s.³⁹

Spanish sovereignty was at stake in sixteenth-century Panama due to the sparse population of peninsular Spaniards and the constant instigation of imperial enemies. The growing population of *palenques* (Maroons communities) also marked the lack of colonial control in the region. Marronage was a particularly intense phenomenon in the mountainous areas of Panama, where fugitives could live outside of colonial authority. There, Maroons established self-sufficient villages with agricultural, fishing, and mining industries while maintaining cooperative bonds with Indigenous groups. The first accounts of Marronage in Panama are dated to 1521, when *vecinos* from Panamá city informed Emperor Charles I about the flight of multiple enslaved Africans to Indigenous towns.⁴⁰ In 1534, Lieutenant Governor Andagoya organized an expedition in Nombre de Dios to fight the Maroons who had already founded several settlements in the surrounding areas and were disrupting control over urban enslaved populations.⁴¹ By the last third of the sixteenth-century, Panama had one of the largest Maroon communities in the entire Spanish empire. In his 1575 description of the region, *oidor* Criado de Castilla stated that there were nearly 3,000 Maroons.⁴² Although Criado de Castilla’s estimation may be exaggerated, Maroons certainly outnumbered Spaniards.⁴³ Between 1553 and 1558, Spanish authority over Panama was challenged by the Maroons commanded by Bayano I, an African nobleman who had proclaimed himself king of the Maroons.⁴⁴ Although Spanish forces were able to defeat him, he remained in the collective memory as a symbol of resistance. Maroons maintained a firm hierarchical social and military structure in their settlements and continued

37. María del Carmen Mena, *La ciudad en un cruce de caminos: Panamá y sus orígenes urbanos*, (Sevilla: CSIC, 1992), 236.

38. A.G.I. Panamá, leg. 13, r. 22, N.150.

39. María del Carmen Mena, *La sociedad de Panamá*, 266-269.

40. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cinarrones*, 52-53.

41. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cinarrones*, 52-5, 67, 80. Bibiano Torres, Juana Gil-Bermejo, Enriqueta Vila, *Cartas de cabildos hispanoamericanos: Audiencia de Panamá, estudio preliminar y edición*, (Madrid: CSIC, 1978), 19.

42. Javier Laviña, “Atlantization and the First Failed Slavery: Panama from the Sixteenth to the Seventeenth Century,” in *Atlantic Transformations: Empire, Politics, and Slavery during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Dale W. Tomich, (Binghamton: SUNY Press, 2020), 182.

43. Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 18.

44. Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 189-217.

fighting against imperial authorities for decades with Indigenous and English support.⁴⁵

After Francis Drake’s pillage of Nombre de Dios in July of 1572, Spaniards knew about the dangerous consequences of Maroon–corsair alliances.⁴⁶ Just months later, Drake and the Maroons attacked Venta de Cruces in their attempt to capture the royal treasury.⁴⁷ By late November of 1573, the *Cabildo* of Nombre de Dios and the Audiencia de Panama were taking drastic decisions to address the multiple attacks of the Maroons and their allies, who were sabotaging trade routes, stealing thousands of gold pesos, and killing hundreds of Spaniards. In 1577, following several disagreements, the *Cabildo* of Panama named him captain of the Spanish army.⁴⁸ Ortega gathered an army of nearly 300 men, including Antón Zape and many other enslaved Africans. López Vaz’s account of John Oxenham’s 1576–1577 expedition shows the sheer number of Afro-descendants who participated in this conflict, rowing, assisting, and fighting.⁴⁹

Antón’s Black identity and enslaved status did not prevent him from obtaining high rank in the Spanish army. While serving his military superior and enslaver, Ortega Valencia, Antón had autonomy to again demonstrate his industry and loyalty to the Crown. Antón was appointed as captain by Ortega. Ortega had high esteem for his enslaved person and total confidence in his martial and leadership skills, previously demonstrated in the Salomon expedition. The *Zape* were positively viewed, as Iberians familiar with Upper Guineans publicly claimed they were “top quality Blacks.”⁵⁰ By the mid-sixteenth century, the *Zape* people were considered valuable members of colonial society. They had demonstrated their loyalty through excellent services to the Crown from early colonization. Upper Guineans’ perceptions gave them superior status over other sub-Saharan Africans, placing them “in positions of relative autonomy or authority over other Africans.”⁵¹ As a captain, Antón led one of the Spanish regiments, commanding dozens of soldiers, whose authority extended beyond his Black peers, to even Spaniards. He was not the only African descendant to serve in a position of power during the Second Bayano War; many others were

45. Margaret M. Olsen, “African re-inscription of body and Space in New Granada,” in *Mapping Colonial Spanish America: Places and Commonplaces of Identity, Culture and Experience*, eds. Santa Arias and Mariselle Meléndez, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 51-68.

46. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 126-127.

47. Kris Lane, *Pillaging*, 29-55.

48. A.G.I. Panamá, 135, N.1, R.3. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 144-145. Schwaller reproduces plenty of documents that reveal the political tensions and different military and tactical approaches that Panamanian administrators had to address the Maroon revolt. Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons*.

49. Lopez Vaz’s Account of John Oxenham’s 1576 expedition, in Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 129-135.

50. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 25.

51. *Ibid.*, 25.

named upper officers of the Spanish army during the war and were awarded with royal-sponsored manumissions and pensions.⁵²

The Spaniards initiated a military response after learning that Oxenham and the Maroons traveled downriver to the Gulf of San Miguel, where they were constructing ships to raid Spanish trade vessels and pillage the Pearl Islands.⁵³ They sailed off with Antón for 40 days in six *fragatas* (one probably commanded by Antón himself as captain),⁵⁴ and inspected the Pearl Islands and the coast until they arrived in the Piñas River Delta. From there, they headed upriver, following a trail of food left by English troops. Ortega's *memorial* indicates that the river narrowed and that many of his soldiers remained in the boats while only the bravest and most experienced accompanied him on foot upriver. Antón was one of these "few" brilliant soldiers who left the boats in search of the English.⁵⁵ They "jumped" from the boats onto the land and walked for hours until they found the English and the Maroons.

Antón and the Spaniards found the Maroon and English settlement on Easter of 1577 after days of searching. They fought against 80 Maroons and 30 English soldiers by the side of the Piñas River. "With his own hand," Antón killed many of the 25 English men that Spanish forces defeated, and many other Maroons. The Maroons and the English tried to escape by fleeing along the river, but Antón followed and killed several more. The president of the Audiencia de Panamá, Pedro Ramirez, emphasized Antón's audacity and valor in his recommendation for his manumission by stating that "he [Antón Zape] killed man by man by his own hands many Maroons."⁵⁶ He personally killed one of Juan Vaquero's captains, who was fleeing with him to Vallano. According to President Ramirez, Antón Zape was the only who defeated "the bravest captain of the maroons," an achievement that not even captain Ortega Valencia could include in his own proof of merits.⁵⁷ English leader Oxenham and the Maroon leader, Juan Vaquero, ultimately fled to the Maroon settlement of Vallano, but they had suffered severe injuries from African soldiers commanded by Antón.

Antón personally captured many of the Maroons and English prisoners and chased them down when they managed to escape. Ramirez highlighted how

52. María del Carmen Mena, *La Sociedad*, 373.

53. Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 129.

54. Lopez Vaz's account differs from Ortega Valencia's, and states that there were only four *fragatas* with around a hundred men each. Each *fragata* was commanded by a captain who had authority over 25 men. Lopez Vaz's Account of John Oxenham's 1576 expedition, in Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 129-135.

55. A.G.I. Patronato, 135, N.1, R.3.

56. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, ff. 12.v.-13. r. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, R.22, N.150. A.G.I. Audiencia de Panamá, 1, N.30.

57. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, ff. 12.v.-13. r. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, R.22, N.150. A.G.I. Panamá, 1, N.30.

Antón Zape captured a runaway English captain (one of Oxenham’s officers) who fled from the battlefield into the jungle to avoid arrest. Antón followed him for miles across the Piñas River and, within hours, caught and killed him.⁵⁸ Ramírez’s narrative underlines Antón Zape’s perseverance and devoted service to the Crown with arms bravely fighting at the risk of his life for the king. All these services caused Ramirez to describe Antón Zape as “a very prized Black person,” worthy of freedom and other royal rewards⁵⁹

Some days after this episode, on *Jueves Santo*, Antón and the Spaniards arrived at a Maroon settlement where they fought for over an hour until Spanish forces eventually defeated the Maroons. Weeks later, in April of 1577, the *Cabildo* of Panamá sent Ortega Valencia to Spain to get more resources from the Spanish Crown. Although we do not know whether Antón Zape accompanied his enslaver to the Iberian Peninsula, it is certain that Ortega asked for a license to bring some of his enslaved Africans with him. Antón was likely among them, considering his invaluable merit demonstrated in brave service fighting for the king, which also brought honor to his enslaver. Ortega and Antón remained in Spain for almost a year, returning to Tierra Firme in late 1577. In Spain Ortega and Antón resided in Seville and Madrid, where Ortega sent several *memoriales* to the Council of the Indies and even met with them in audience. He achieved the official appointment of Captain General of Panama, and secured more funding for uniforms and other resources needed in the Second Bayano War.⁶⁰

In 1577, Antón and Ortega were sent by the Audiencia de Panama to Portobelo, where another prominent Maroon settlement was destabilizing the area. Their goal was to avoid the Maroons of Portobelo and join those at Vallano along with their English allies. By June of 1577, Ortega and his forces, including Antón, had defeated the Maroons and secured the fragile Spanish sovereignty over the region. However, Ortega’s claim of victory was premature. There were still many Maroons and English corsairs at large in Panama. During much of 1577 and 1578, General Diego de Frías Trejo conducted an active campaign against the Maroons on behalf of the viceroy of Peru.⁶¹ Trejo’s efforts to pacify the region provoked several conflicts with the president of the Audiencia de Panama, who attempted to limit his power.⁶² In 1578, Frías defeated Maroon forces and captured English officers John Butler and John Oxenham, who were transferred to Lima in June 1578 to be interrogated by viceregal officers.⁶³ In January 1579,

58. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, ff. 12.v-13. r. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, R.22, N.150. A.G.I. Audiencia de Panamá, 1, N.30.

59. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, R.22, N.150.

60. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 144-145.

61. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 148-149.

62. *Ibid.*, 150.

63. *Ibid.* 160-161. Robert C. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 158-160.

Ortega Valencia arrived from Spain as a general captain with personnel, equipment, and economic resources. Ortega employed several loyal Africans as messengers to inform the rebel Maroons that they would be welcome in peace and resettled in *reducciones* if they surrendered.⁶⁴

By 1579, the Bayano Maroons informed Spanish authorities that they were willing to negotiate their surrender in exchange for their own settlements with certain autonomy in the plains.⁶⁵ Ortega's letter to Philip II informs him of his meeting and preliminary negotiations with the leaders of the Maroons, Antón Mandinga and Juan Jolofo.⁶⁶ Shortly after, in March of 1579, Maroons from Nombre de Dios and Portobelo followed their Bayano peers and established negotiations with the Spaniards.⁶⁷ In May, Maroons from Cerro de Cabra also surrendered.⁶⁸ However, in 1579, Francis Drake reappeared near the coasts of Panama, causing panic and fear among Spanish administrators. Negotiations with the Maroons were temporarily interrupted.⁶⁹

In September 1579, Luis Mozambique and Pedro Zape signed a treaty with the Spaniards. Their communities received a royal pardon, and they were granted economic compensation and honorific titles, such as "*don*."⁷⁰ Most Maroons were allocated in Santiago del Principe, near the Francisca River, where the Bayano Maroons settled their communities under the leadership of Pedro Zape and Luis Mozambique, who were named life-tenured governor and lieutenant of the town.⁷¹ Ortega established similar negotiations with other Maroon communities, which eventually led to the foundation of additional Maroon settlements, including Santa Cruz la Real. By the end of 1580, the project of the *reducciones* was nearly complete. Antón played a significant role in supervising military and logistical affairs as captain of the Spanish army. Antón may have been appointed captain by Ortega following the 1579 breakdown, during which Ortega resumed military campaigns (between 1580 and 1581) against the remaining Maroon communities that still needed to be reduced.⁷²

64. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 173-177.

65. Testimony of Rodrigo Hernández, Dean of the Cathedral of Panama City, dated August 30, 1580. In Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 178-184.

66. Letter of Pedro Ortega to Philip II dated June 14, 1579. In Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 173-177.

67. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 184-185.

68. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 186-187.

69. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 185.

70. Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 195.

71. Schwaller, *African Maroons*, 189-190.

72. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 195-233.

AGAINST HIS ENSLAVER'S WILL: ANTÓN'S FREEDOM AND THE CROWN INTERCESSION

In 1584, immediately after the defeat of the Maroons and during the pacification of Panama, Antón Zape received a letter of manumission that made him a free person.⁷³ Antón became one of the few 300 Africans who by 1575 had received their freedom.⁷⁴ Antón's freedom was not initiated by his enslaver, Captain Pedro Ortega Valencia, who was legally empowered to grant him his manumission either by *Libertad graciosa* (goodwill), by Antón's *Coartación* (self-purchase), or through a third-party transaction.⁷⁵ Antón had served his enslaver for decades before gaining his freedom, and Ortega was not interested in losing such a skilled and loyal slave. Antón obtained his freedom through royal intercession against his enslaver's will. Although the rights of slaveholders were protected and the institution of slavery was highly regulated by a set of legal procedures that granted enslavers the right to exercise full authority over their slaves' will,⁷⁶ the Crown had the authority to intercede in cases of exceptional merits and loyalty of service to the empire.⁷⁷ The Crown encouraged enslavers to grant freedom to loyal and meritorious slaves, such that royal institutions struggled to protect and enhance the manumission of enslaved people who represented a model of conduct for the rest of the enslaved population.⁷⁸ On the basis of the *Siete Partidas*, the Castilian legal corpus allowed and even supported the administration's forceful emancipation of enslaved people without the enslaver's approval in cases where enslaved Africans demonstrated excellent service to the kingdom.⁷⁹ In these cases, the general interest of the *Res Publica* was more important than any individual. This was Antón's case after a lifetime serving and bearing arms for his majesty against the Maroons and the English forces in Panama.

In February of 1581, Captain Ortega Valencia sent a *memorial* and a long proof of merits to the Council of Indies via the Audiencia de Panamá. He requested economic pensions in reward of his military service against the Maroons and the English corsairs.⁸⁰ In his *memorial*, Ortega did not mention Antón nor any of his

73. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, ff. 12.v-13. r.

74. María del Carmen Mena, *La sociedad*, 371-372.

75. Antonio Feros and Arlindo Caldeira, "Black Africans in the Iberian Peninsula (1400–1820)," in *The Iberian World, 1450-1820*, eds. Fernando Bouza, Pedro Cardim and Antonio Feros, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 261-280.

76. Deborah Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 21, 194-238.

77. Sue Peabody, "Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World, 1420–1807," in *The Cambridge History of Slavery*, vol. III, eds. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 594-630.

78. Ricardo Raul Salazar, *Mastering the Law: Slavery and Freedom in the Legal Ecology of the Spanish Empire*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2020), 91-93.

79. William D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 130.

80. A.G.I. Panamá, 42, N.21. A.G.I. Panamá, 1, N.30. A.G.I. Panamá, 61, N. 44.

brilliant services. However, on April 25, 1583, Pedro Ramírez de Quiñones, president of Panamá, sent a letter to the Council of Indies referring to Ortega's request for royal grants. He underscored Antón's services in the Second Bayano War. President Quiñones highlighted Antón's *calidad* and meritorious virtues, providing a sincere statement of Antón's bravery and soul-value.⁸¹ Although Ramirez presented Antón as Ortega's enslaved person, he barely mentioned Ortega in the letter, denoting that Quiñones understood Antón's services to be a product of his own industry and efforts apart from Ortega.

Ramirez affirmed that, while Antón was an exceptionally esteemed vassal of the king (*es negro de mucho precio*), his enslaver was not willing to grant him freedom. He stated, "His enslaver will not [manumit him] not even for two thousand pesos, but if His Majesty orders [Ortega] to do so, he would grant him gracious freedom."⁸² Ramirez employed the word *precio* (price) as a double entendre; he referred both to Antón's civic and monetary value.⁸³ Antón's civic capital was defined by President Ramirez through his model conduct as a loyal and highly skilled soldier who had amply demonstrated his industry to the Crown. However, as an enslaved man, Antón was still viewed as a commodity by his enslaver and the administration. Indeed, Antón's behavior and excellent services increased his monetary value in the eyes of his enslaver, Pedro Ortega, who was reluctant to accept Antón's manumission for only 2,000 pesos. Despite Ortega's being one of the most prominent military figures in Panamá, his authority could not outweigh Antón's exemplary services.⁸⁴ In fact, Ramirez claimed that manumitting Antón from Ortega was an act of "justice."⁸⁵ Ramirez advocated for Antón and, against his enslaver's will, recommended that Philip II intercede by personally forcing Ortega to grant Antón his "*Libertad Graciosa*" (gracious liberty).

Ramirez's letter and advocacy reveals the attitude of the Panamanian Audiencia toward the king's Afro-descended vassals and demonstrates the administration's compulsion to protect the rights and interests of those who served the Crown and Spanish sovereignty regardless of their racial origin. The Audiencia magistrates considered Antón Zape worthy to be a lawful vassal of the king

81. Letter of Pedro Ramirez de Quiñones, President of the Audiencia de Panamá, to King Philip II, dated April 25, 1583. A.G.I. Panamá, leg. 13, r. 22, N.150.

82. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, r. 22, N.150.

83. Enslaved people were considered "status symbols" that demonstrated the economic power of their enslavers. They were also seen as profitable investments, as they would work in both domestic and agricultural settings, and even provide services to third parties, generating economic income for their enslavers. In the dehumanizing context of slavery, enslaved people were seen as a monetary commodity and an important asset in the domestic economy. Antonio Feros and Arlindo Caldeira, "Black Africans." Tamara J. Walkers, *Exquisite Slaves: Race, Clothing, and Status in Colonial Lima*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 25-33. A.C. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 64.

84. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, ff. 15.r-17. r.

85. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, r. 22, N.150.

and unanimously sided with Antón even against a powerful enslaver such as Ortega. But freedom was not enough for someone of Antón Zape’s merit. Ramírez asked the king for authorization to grant Antón Zape land grants to live with dignity and to economically sustain his wife (who was also an enslaved *Zape* woman in Panama City), reminding the king that the Crown “[should] reward with land-grants” those who increase his kingdoms in Panama.⁸⁶

On December 16, 1583, the Council of Indies sent Philip II both Ortega Valencia’s application for rewards and Ramírez’s petition for Antón Zape’s freedom (Figure 1).⁸⁷ Counselors from the Council of Indies presented Antón Zape as a “brave man” who largely served the king in Panama. They underscored Antón’s *calidad* and informed the king that he was recommended by the president of the Audiencia of Panamá himself. The Council of the Indies’ resolution was to endorse Ramírez’s determination and encourage Philip II to grant Antón Zape his freedom and an economic pension of 50 gold pesos per year. The fact that Antón Zape was a married person also proved an authoritative argument in his case. The institution of marriage provided enslaved people the ability to create new kinship bonds among people of African descent (usually with people from the same region and/or ethnic community)⁸⁸ and, especially, rights and legal protection as Christian subjects.⁸⁹ These rights were protected by both the Church and the Crown, causing many conflicts between enslaved people-enslavers and enslaved Christian since legislation prohibited enslavers from selling married enslaved Africans.

Married enslaved people had the legal ability to litigate their rights to have a conjugal life in royal and episcopal courts, and they could even push the administration to force their enslavers to sell them to the same owner so they could live together.⁹⁰ While the Crown saw marriage among enslaved people as a tool of population control, the Church defended sacramental rights and good Christian customs.⁹¹ Enslaved people strategically navigated royal and ecclesiastical jurisdictions to defend their rights and resist criminal sanctions, calling legal representatives from both jurisdictions to argue for their cases. They

86. A.G.I. Panamá, 13, r. 22, N.150. On the “Economy of favor,” see: Alejandro Cañeque, *The King’s Living Image: The Culture and Power of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 174.

87. A.G.I. Panamá, 1, N.30.

88. Sherwin K. Bryant, *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage: Governing through Slavery in Colonial Quito*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 102.

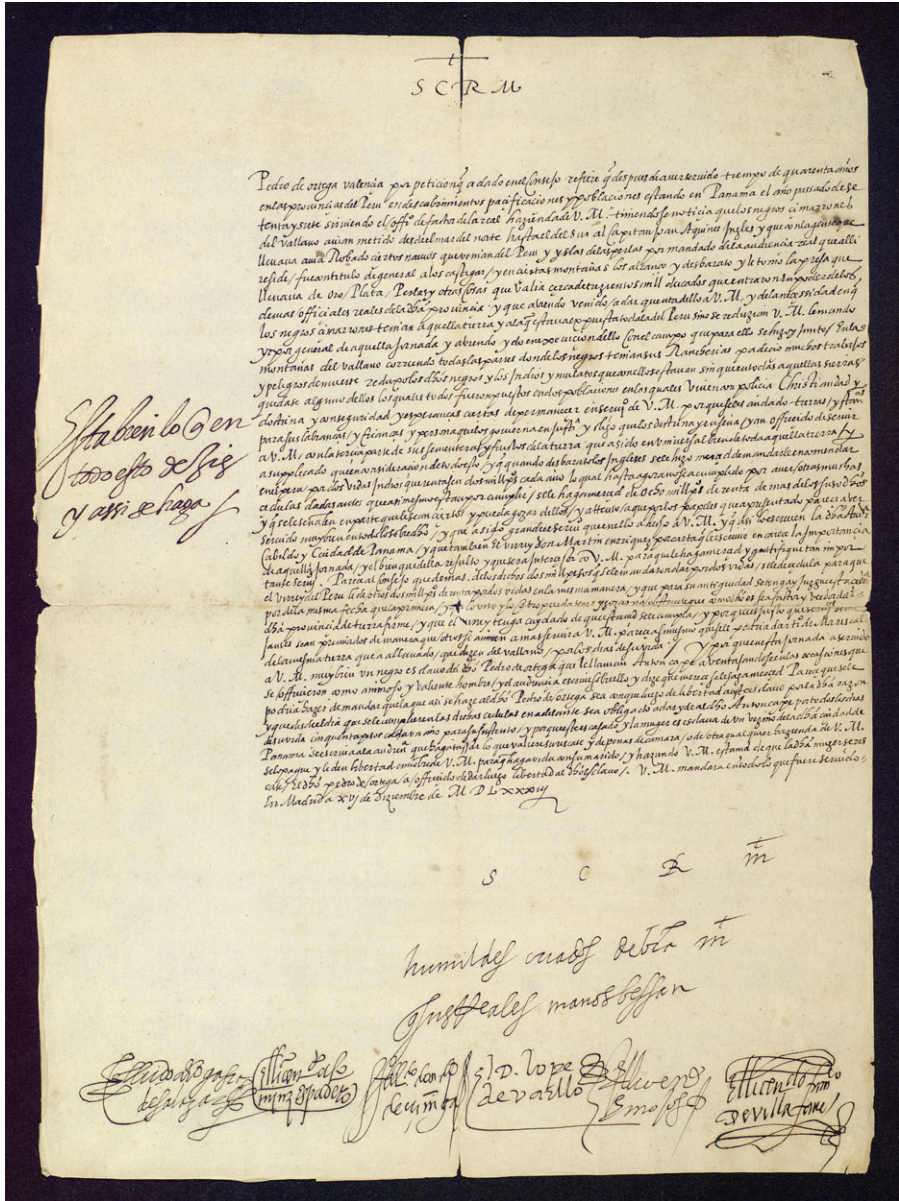
89. Rachel Sarah O’Toole, “(Un) Making Christianity: The African Diaspora in Slavery and Freedom,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American Christianity*, eds. David Thomas Orique, Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens, and Virginia Garrard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 101-121.

90. Rachel S. O’Toole, *Bound Lives*, 101-121. Michelle A. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy, and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima, 1600-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-26, 74-108.

91. Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*, (Bloomsbury: Indiana University Press, 2005), 44-47.

FIG. 1

Memoranda of the Council of the Indies and Philip II's response on the royal grants requested by Ortega Valencia and the manumission of Antón Zape, dated December 16, 1583. A.G.I. Panamá, 1, N.30.



presented themselves as sincere, honorable, and respected members of the Christian society.⁹² As a husband, Antón Zape was a *Paterfamilias* who had the duty of providing resources to his wife and family, who were legally considered his dependents. Therefore, he was entitled to receive assistance from both the Church and the State to fulfill his duties as the head of the household.⁹³

Considering that Antón Zape’s freedom was endorsed by royal intercession, the Council of the Indies recommended Philip II to manumit Antón’s wife “so she can live with her husband.”⁹⁴ The council defended the couple’s right to live together and lead a conjugal life in accordance with canon law as good Christians and vassals of the Catholic Spanish monarch. Counselors indicated that his wife’s *rescate* (freedom’s price) could come from any *pena de cámara* (tax) or other *hacienda* (royal coffer) in Panama, revealing that, in cases of couple’s rights as spouses, the State would not hesitate to take resources from any treasury to procure their mutual cohabitation. Antón Zape’s wife’s manumission was critical for his own freedom since Indies counselors informed the king that captain Ortega Valencia would agree to manumit his enslaved person through an economic compensation (redemption fee) only if the king had previously manumitted his wife. Ortega’s request suggests that Antón and his wife probably asked their owners to sell them to the same enslaver so that they could live together in the past without a favorable outcome. For Antón Zape and his wife, to obtain freedom together was a way to seek redress for years of marriage without respect to their sacramental rights.

Many enslavers stipulated that manumissions could only take effect when their enslaved people obtained a suitable marriage. While this narrative offered the enslavers the chance to be portrayed as good Christians,⁹⁵ it was their strategy to unfairly postpone manumissions by rejecting suitors or manipulating the promise of freedom.⁹⁶ Enslavers deliberately calculated their enslaved people’s manumissions to exploit them as long as they could. The multiple strategies employed by enslavers to grant conditional manumissions kept their enslaved Africans hopeful they would attain freedom while making them dependent upon their enslavers, to whom they were to profess benevolence until they finally fulfilled their promise of freedom.⁹⁷ Ortega’s narrative reflects this strategy to delay the manumission of his slave to keep him in service and present himself as a good Christian enslaver before the king and the imperial administration.

92. *Ibid.*, 126-154; 51-79. Michelle A. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms*, 74-108.

93. Bennett, *Africans*, 81.

94. A.G.I. Panamá, 1, N.30.

95. Sherwin K. Bryant, *Rivers*, 95.

96. Deborah Blumenthal, *Enemies*, 207.

97. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *El Negro en la Real Audiencia de Quito, siglos XVI-XVIII*, (Quito: Abya Yala, 2006), 208-212.

Ortega's narrative was a kind of fiction since he well knew that both the Audiencia de Panamá and the Council of Indies were advocating for Zape's freedom. He understood that, despite his own will, the Crown was probably going to intercede for Zape and force his manumission. Ortega's rhetoric suggests he was well aware that the Crown would side with Zape considering the multiple previous legal cases in which enslaved Africans had gained their right to family as Christian subjects.⁹⁸ On top of the bitter relationship Ortega had with many Spanish administrators in Panama, the prospect that his enslaved person would be freed by royal intercession forced him to accept Zape's demands for freedom and invent an ambiguous narrative. Ortega was firmly opposed to Antón's manumission, not in the least because he feared losing a trial against his enslaved person who had already received the official endorsement of imperial institutions. Thus, Ortega crafted a statement that would save face by presenting him as a pious man willing to permit his enslaved person to marry in accordance with canon law. In actuality, his testimony reveals his anxieties to maintain his public reputation and social standing. Ortega's case demonstrates that, in certain cases, enslavers felt legally vulnerable since enslaved people's rights as a "married couple superseded the will and personal authority of their master."⁹⁹ Antón Zape subverted Ortega's authority by exploiting the Iberian legal structure, the cultural and belief system, and the patronage dynamics that eventually forced his owner to accept his claims to freedom without even going to court.

SUBVERTING THE ENSLAVER'S AUTHORITY: THE MANUMISSION, THE ECONOMIC PENSION, AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE SPANISH SOVEREIGNTY

In the 1583 memorandum in response to Ortega Valencia's request for royal grants, Philip II answered the Council of Indies's suggestions favorably: "Everything seems fine to me, and you can order it."¹⁰⁰ On March 31, 1583, the Audiencia de Panamá issued Antón Zape's letter of manumission by the king's decree (Figure 2).¹⁰¹ The document reads that Ortega Valencia granted Zape his freedom "by His Majesty grace," confirming Ortega's opposition to his enslaved person's manumission. The king granted freedom to both Antón and his wife "so they can live together" ordering royal officers in Panamá to employ any economic resources available to manumit Antón Zape's wife: "You will rescue

98. Rebecca Anne Goetz, "Religion and Race in the Greater South, 1500-1800," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History*, eds. Kathryn Gin Lum and Paul Harvey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 357-370. Jessica Delgado and Kelsey Moss, "Religion and Race in the Early Modern Iberian Atlantic," in *The Oxford Handbook*, 40-60. Sherwin K. Bryant, *Rivers of Gold*, 103-113.

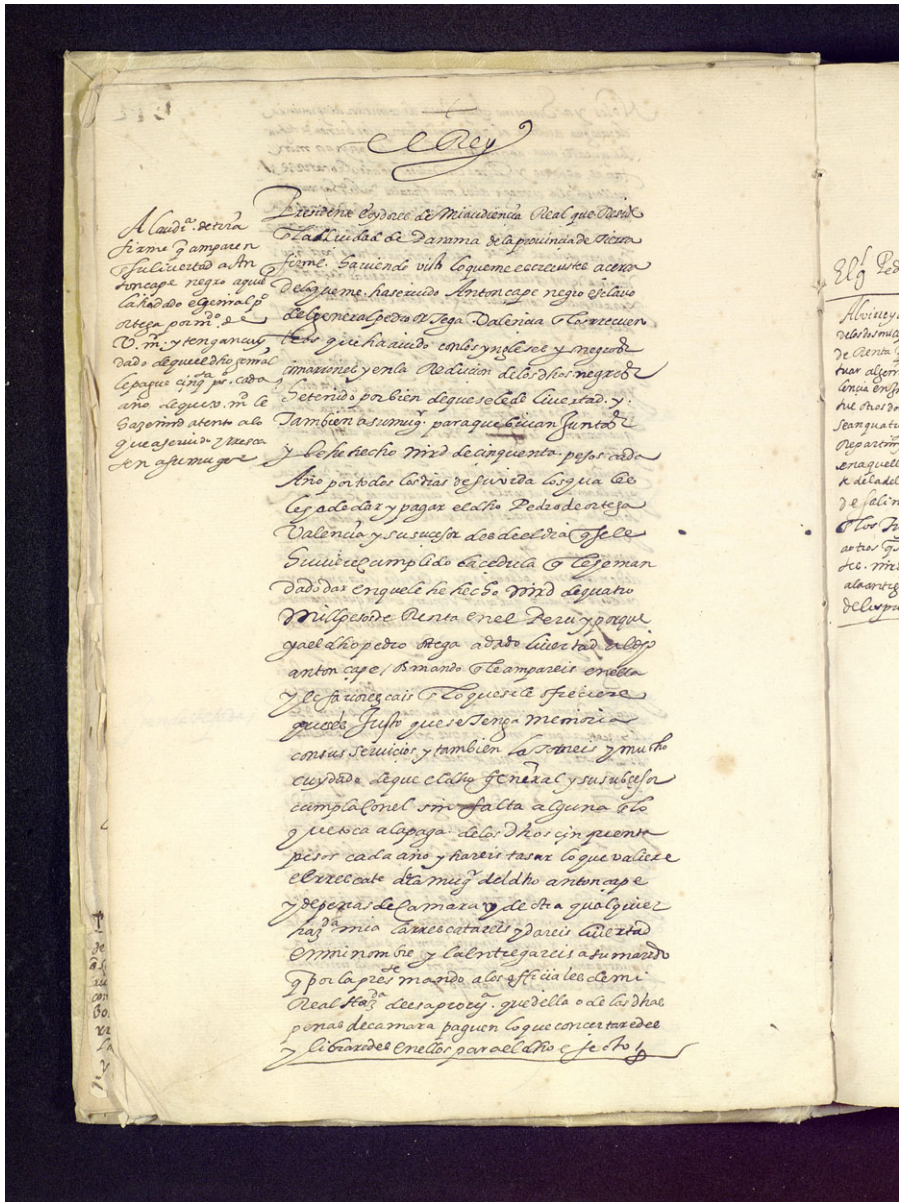
99. Bennett, *Africans*, 127.

100. A.G.I. Panamá, 1, N.30.

101. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, ff. 12.v-13. r.

FIG. 2

Letter of manumission granted by King Philip II of Spain upon Antón Zape on March 31, 1583. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, f. 12.v.



and liberate her in my name, and reunite her with her husband.”¹⁰² Philip II also granted them an annual pension of 50 gold pesos “for all days of his life” so they could live decently. Philip II ordered Captain Ortega Valencia and his descendants to pay this pension to Antón “without any excuse” during his life.

The king stipulated that the 50 pesos should come from Ortega’s own incomes. In a 1583 *memorial* requesting royal grants, Ortega had asked for an annual pension of 4,000 pesos from the royal coffers of Perú.¹⁰³ While the king granted Ortega this generous grant, he ordered him to pay Antón’s pension from these 4,000 pesos. Indeed, the king’s decree reveals an arduous negotiation between Ortega and the Crown, in which Philip II would grant him this pension only if Ortega would accept to manumit Antón Zape. The king stated, “since Ortega had already manumitted Zape, I ordered you [the president of the Audiencia] to grant him it [the pension],”¹⁰⁴ indicating that liberating Zape was prerequisite for Ortega to receive his economic grant. Ortega’s resistance to manumit Zape had pushed the Crown to stop any grant to the captain unless he obeyed what the Audiencia and the Council of Indies recommended. The administration compelled Ortega to grant a coerced manumission to receive the pension he had long requested.

In 1593, Ortega sent another *memorial* requesting the Crown to increase this 4,000-pesos annual stipend for his 40 years of service to sustain his wife and family according to his *calidad*.¹⁰⁵ Once again, he did not mention Antón Zape in his narrative nor any of his outstanding services while serving him. Attached to the petition was a 1584 royal response from Philip II wherein the monarch acknowledged Ortega’s merits and listed a number of royal grants to be bestowed upon Ortega (Figure 3). However, in the last part of the royal response sent by the king to Fernando de Torres, Viceroy of Perú, Philip II referred to Antón Zape. This document was produced only a year after granting Antón Zape his manumission, confirming that Zape’s manumission was made against Ortega’s will, and that the Crown was monitoring Antón’s well-being and seeing that Ortega promptly fulfilled his obligation to pay Antón his annual pension.

The document reads that Antón’s manumission was the result of “the king’s mandate:” “To whom [Antón Zape] has manumitted because of my order.”¹⁰⁶ It is very significant that Philip II named Antón at the end of the decree, in one of the most important places in the document, as it highlights the need to comply with a

102. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, f. 12.v.

103. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, f. 13.r.

104. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, f. 12.v.

105. A.G.I. Patronato, 135., N.1., R.3.

106. A.G.I. Patronato, 135., N.1., R.3.

royal order, and especially, to remember its importance to the Crown. By putting Antón's name at the end of the document, Philip II reveals his desire to favor Antón by reminding the viceroy of Perú, the highest authority in the viceroyalty, to safeguard his interests at all costs. The king was probably concerned about the prospect that Ortega might avoid or hinder the payment to his former enslaved person owing to his reluctance to manumit him and the frequent complaints about his financial need. Ortega probably requested an increase in his pension in his 1593 *memorial* to balance the amount that was siphoned from it to fund his former enslaved person.

The king's resolution placed Antón Zape in a position of power over his enslaver since he was now integral to Ortega's wealth. The decree even suggests that Ortega's good standing with the Crown rested upon Antón Zape's manumission. By forcing Ortega to manumit him and pay his former enslaved person a pension, Antón Zape subverted the "perpetual" gratitude that enslaved had to profess to their enslavers once they became *esclavos horros* (free people).¹⁰⁷ Manumission was a practice of "graciousness" in which slaveholders provided their enslaved Africans freedom because of the unnatural nature of servitude in a Christian society whose legal foundations were based on Roman law.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, enslaved people should be "grateful" with their enslavers since *libertad graciosa* was an act of mercy.¹⁰⁹ However, in this case Antón Zape did not express gratitude to his enslaver nor was he dependent upon him. Ortega had to ensure that his former enslaved person lived with dignity, providing him economic resources to live a life in freedom without any commitment toward him. Indeed, it was Ortega who was indebted to Antón Zape, demonstrating that manumission was a complex practice that depended on legal procedures and the mastering of law, as well as multiple motivations and interests that merged through arduous negotiation.¹¹⁰

The Crown's sponsorship of Antón Zape, his wife's manumission, and his royal intercession to force Ortega to accept Antón Zape's claims to freedom reveal both the fragility of enslavers' authority and the pivotal role of Afro-descendants in maintaining Spanish sovereignty over the Americas. Historians have long demonstrated the critical contribution of African descendants in the defense of

107. Jorge Fonseca, *Escravos e senhores na Lisboa quincentista*, (Lisbon: Colibri, 2010), 393. A.C. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves*, 138-141.

108. William D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

109. Evelyn P. Jennings, "Imperial Defense and Manumission in Havana, 1762-1800," in *Paths to Freedom*, 121-142. Mathew Restall, *The Black Middle*, 156. José Luis Cortes, *La esclavitud negra en la España peninsular del siglo XVI*, (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), 152.

110. Paola A. Revilla Orías, *Entangled Coercion: African and Indigenous Labour in Charcas, 16th-17th Centuries*, (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 233-242.

the empire and the vast benefits that armed service to the king could offer: freedom, economic pensions, honors, tax exemptions, and an array of socioeconomic privileges and legal prerogatives.¹¹¹ Military corporate identity offered Afro-descendants arenas to contest many legal limitations imposed over racially diverse vassals, while providing tools to negotiate status, secure privileges, and even redefine their condition.¹¹² Military participation was, indeed, the most valuable service that an individual could perform for the Crown, considered a “supreme act of fealty and colonial citizenship” by its implication of risk of life to promote the monarchy’s interests.¹¹³ Bearing arms for his majesty was the main avenue for public recognition of rightful citizenship and vassalage, and it provided people of African descent spaces for political participation and legal activism.¹¹⁴

The Crown granted Antón Zape his freedom in the context of the Maroon revolt and the English incursions in Panama, a territory where Spanish jurisdiction was tenuously disputed. Therefore, the manumission reflects the Crown’s need to reward loyal vassals regardless of their social, ethnic, and racial background to maintain and expand Spanish frontiers, rather than as a mere act of royal grace or justice. Antón Zape was not granted freedom by the king’s benevolence; he attained his freedom by *merced*, a contract of service between subjects and king that obliged royal reward to legally recognize the merits of all vassals.¹¹⁵ The royal intercession reveals the positive conception of the imperial administrators with respect to the Africans, who they considered Spanish vassals by right, as well as the fragility of Spanish authority over Panama and its dependence upon people of African origin for its maintenance. By being awarded freedom and an economic pension, Antón Zape was recognized as a free Black Spaniard with the same rights as any Spanish subject of the king of Spain.¹¹⁶ His case warrants a reevaluation of the social position of Afro-descendants in the Americas, especially

111. Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free Colored Militia of New Spain, Black Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 131-172.

112. *Ibid.*, 5.

113. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall, “Black Soldiers, Native Soldiers: Meanings of Military Service in the Spanish American Colonies,” in *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Matthew Restall, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2005), 15-52. Ben Vinson III, “Race and Badge: Free-Colored Soldiers in the Colonial Mexican Militia,” *The Americas*, Vol. 56, 4, (2000), 471-496.

114. María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 160. Matthew Restall, “Manuel’s World: Black Yucatán and the Colonial Caribbean,” in *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*, eds. Jane G. Landers and Barry Robinson, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 147-174. Norah L. Gharala, *Taxing Blackness*, 82. Antonio Feros, *Speaking of Spain: The Evolution of Race and Nation in the Hispanic World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 144.

115. Alejandro Cañeque, *The King’s*, 174.

116. Juan Manuel Ramirez, “Sowing,” 197-219.

in territories where the Spanish Crown's ability to exercise authority was limited. In Panama, where Spaniards were the vast minority, Afro-descendants emerged as the main guarantors of imperial sovereignty.

Antón Zape's freedom signifies both imperial efforts to display a message of just recompense, and the deep loyalty that enslaved Africans professed to the king despite their enslavement. During the Maroon rebellions, military officers feared that Black militias and soldiers of African descent would side with Maroons and violently seize their freedom rather than attain it through the manumission system.¹¹⁷ This fear was greater in territories such as Panama, where Afro-descendants outnumbered Spaniards. Despite Iberians' negative assumptions about the untrustworthy nature of Africans, Spaniards often relied on people of African descent and even enslaved Africans to fight the runaway enslaved people.¹¹⁸ Antón Zape did not flee to join Maroon forces against the Spanish, as many officers considered a possibility; rather, he distinguished himself as the bravest, most meritorious, and most loyal soldier in the Spanish army. His services made him a model of conduct lauded by upper administrators and worthy of Philip II's personal recognition.

Ironically, Antón Zape's service eventually led to his naming as captain, which put him in a position to lead troops against the Maroons. Antón Zape's participation in the military campaign against the Maroons and his services demonstrate the solid commitment of Afro-descendants to the Spanish Crown, their understanding of military service as a path to freedom and social recognition, and the pragmatism of Spanish officers in the need for imperial defense. Surrounded by Maroons and challenged by imperial enemies and pirates, Spaniards relied on Africans as the only means to maintain Spanish sovereignty.¹¹⁹ As Zape did, many African soldiers loyally served the Spanish king and, in return, attained their freedom and full citizenship as vassals. Since Zape became a Black Spaniard by risking his life for his majesty, his freedom should not be understood as a royal debt for which he should be grateful, but a willing service to the Crown deserving of reward.

117. Jane G. Landers, "Transforming Bondsmen into Vassals: Arming Slaves in Colonial Spanish America," in *Arming Slaves*, 120-145.

118. Landers, 120-145. María Elena Martínez, "The Black Blood," 479-520. Miguel A. Valerio, *Sovereign Joy: Afro-Mexican Kings and Queens, 1539-1640*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 80-125.

119. Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 68-94. Evelyn P. Jennings, "The Sinews of Spain's American Empire: Forced Labor in Cuba from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth centuries," in *Building the Atlantic Empire: Unfree Labor and Imperial States in the Political Economy of Capitalism, ca. 1500-1914*, eds. John Donoghue and Evelyn P. Jennings, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 25-53.

EMBODYING HONOR AND *CALIDAD*: THE LICENSE TO BEAR ARMS

In 1584, right after his manumission, Antón Zape requested a license to bear arms from the Audiencia de Panama. Just months later, the Audiencia had requested the king to approve Antón's license, and Philip II granted him this privilege that served as a public recognition of masculine honor in colonial society. The Council of the Indies recommended the bestowal of this privilege, and the king did not hesitate to grant Antón his license despite legal opposition. On May 22, 1584, the monarch rewarded Antón for his services against the Maroons and provided him the privilege to bear a dagger and a sword in public spaces (Figure 4).¹²⁰ Indeed, the license was quickly expedited since it was granted and registered in the Audiencia's *Libro de Partes* only months after Antón Zape's request. The urgency and the administration's circumvention of law reveals that the Crown and the imperial institutions recognized that Antón's *calidad* and brilliant services were above all legal and racial considerations.

The concept of *calidad* ("quality," but better translated as status) was a multivalent and fluid instrument of governance and social discrimination employed by Iberian administrators during early modernity.¹²¹ It was a holistic mechanism of evaluation that bound "racial" and ethnic makers with sociocultural means of classification such as wealth, behavior, public reputation, language, place of residence, education, marital status, social interactions, and legal status, in addition to physical appearance, including aspect, clothing, and skin color.¹²² *Calidad* was a highly malleable "elastic commodity" that could vary across time and place depending on the person's circumstances, choices, and public perception.¹²³ It was applied to all vassals of the Spanish king as a tool to gatekeep access to certain social, legal, and economic rights and privileges.¹²⁴ As Joanne Rappaport points out, *calidad* "transcended phenotype by revolving around questions of individual status and the behaviors appropriate to different social ranks, as well as distinguishing between categories of people generated by mixing."¹²⁵ In the last decade, scholars have underscored the unfixed and contested nature of *calidad*.¹²⁶ Because of the ambiguous

120. A.G.I. Panamá, 237, lib. 12, f. 23.r.

121. Jorge E. Delgado, "The Workings of *Calidad*," 215-239. Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portrait and Casta Paintings*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 1-22.

122. Joane Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 32. María Elena Martínez, "The Language, Genealogy and Classification of Race in Colonial Mexico," in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, eds. Iona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25-43. Robert McCaa, "*Calidad*, *Clase*, and Marriage in Colonial Mexico: The Case of Parral, 1788-90." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 64, 3 (1984), 477-501.

123. Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 65.

124. Robert C. Schwaller, *Géneros de Gente*, 27.

125. Joane Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 7.

126. Kathrin Burns, "Unfixing Race," in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, eds. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, (Chicago:

interpretation of the concept by jurists and administrators, *calidad* often enabled political negotiation.¹²⁷

Indeed, *calidad* was a performative criterion based on a rhetoric that could be learned, mastered, and performed in the eyes of the administration through multiple strategies. Even those who were theoretically considered at the bottom of society in the imperial imagination could employ the rhetoric of *calidad* to claim honor and argue for enhanced status.¹²⁸ Global vassals of the Spanish king largely engaged with *calidad* to claim for rights and negotiate status and identity by appealing to exemplary services, virtuous and rational conduct, loyalty, and Christian devotion.¹²⁹ Through a skillful deployment of *calidad* and engagement with Castilian legal culture, ordinary vassals (especially Indigenous and African descendants) successfully established “empowering interactions” between themselves and the administration.¹³⁰ In so doing, they countered the harmful effects of Iberian imperialism by pushing the administration to hear their claims for rights, rewards, and justice.

The license to bear arms was extremely significant for the construction of one’s *calidad* in colonial society. It was a privilege reserved only for Spanish and creole elites that visually represented the social hierarchy.¹³¹ In Iberia, the privilege to bear arms was a symbol of nobility and a prerogative exclusive to those who made up the noble establishment or *hidalgua*.¹³² Iberian aristocratic institutions such as the military orders required candidates to possess and know how to properly handle a horse and a sword. Both were universal symbols of nobility

University of Chicago Press, 2007), 188–202. Pamela A. Patton, “Race, Color and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America,” in *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-17. Jorge E. Delgado, “The Workings of Calidad,” 215-239.

127. Ruth Hill, *Hierarchy, Commerce and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America: A Postal Inspector’s Exposé*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 197-239.

128. Norah Gharala, *Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), 23-46.

129. Robert C. Schwaller, “‘For Honor and Defence’: Race and the Right to Bear Arms in Early Colonial Mexico,” *Colonial Latin American Review*, vol. 21, 2, (2012), 239-266. Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches*, 26–27.

130. André Holenstein, “Empowering Interactions: Looking at State-Building from Below,” in *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State*, eds. Wim Blockmans, André Holenstein, and John Mathieu, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-34. On the petition system, see: Adrian Masters, “A Thousand Invisible Architects: Vassals, the Petition and Response System, and the Creation of Spanish Imperial Caste Legislation,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 98, 3, (2018), 377-406. On the “Lettered City” and its employment by racially and ethnically diverse vassals, see: Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cumins, *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). Also see: Alcira Dueñas, *Indians and Mestizos in the “Lettered City”: Reshaping Justice, Social Hierarchies, and Political Culture in Colonial Peru*, (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2011).

131. For sumptuary laws and the importance of the visual for the social order and the fluidity of identities in colonial society, see: Tamara J. Walker, *Exquisite Slaves*, 1-19, 20-42. Joane Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 17, 50-55.

132. Robert C. Schwaller, “For Honor and Defence,” 239-266.

that identified their holders as *Bellatores*, or defenders of the Christian Republic.¹³³

In the Indies, the Crown granted the right to carry defensive and offensive arms to conquistadors, explorers, and first settlers, but barred the prerogative to *Castas*.¹³⁴ In 1551 and 1552 the Crown began legislating the privilege to bear arms by also prohibiting free *Negros* to carry swords.¹³⁵ This legislation was expanded in 1568 and 1576 when Mestizos (with certain concessions), Indigenous people (except for *Indios nobles* and *principales*), and Blacks were prohibited to bear arms because they were considered an untrustful population with a tendency to provoke social disorder and riots against royal authority.¹³⁶ The sumptuary laws created a public visual and ritual distinction between those who embodied honor and virtue and those who lacked it. For people of African descent, gaining the right and privilege to bear arms was highly symbolic because it offered them a tool for personal defense as well as a means to display and protect their honor. Although duels were prohibited, they were pervasive in Iberian society, and arms were the instrument to protect one's dignity.¹³⁷ Since arms were associated with Iberian notions of social authority and symbolic power through their connotation of the virtuous attributes of bravery, loyalty, and meritorious royal service, Afro-descendants bore arms "proclaiming that their services, lifestyles, and lineages negated the popular stereotypes that they were disloyal, dangerous, and without honor."¹³⁸ In the Iberian peninsula, the art of swordsmanship was particularly important in shaping an honorific identity.

For people of African descent, the right to bear arms was also highly significant. Blackness and martial arts were intimately connected in the Iberian world. Scholars have widely underscored ways that military service provided Black Iberians upward social mobility, negotiation of identity and rights, fiscal status, and public respectability.¹³⁹ Indeed, Restall and Vinson have affirmed that military services represented an act of "supreme fealty and colonial

133. Andrés Mendo, *De las Órdenes Militares: De sus principios, gouierno, privilegios, obligaciones*, (Madrid: 1681), 261-264. *Regla de la Orden y caballería de Santiago*, (Madrid: 1598), 206. On the feudal division of society, see: Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 76-110.

134. Mark A. Burkholder, "Honor and Honors in Colonial Spanish America," in *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America*, eds. Lyman L. Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 18-44.

135. Robert C. Schwaller, "For Honor," 246.

136. María Elena Martínez, "The Black Blood," 479-520.

137. Mark A. Burkholder, "Honor," 18-44.

138. Robert C. Schwaller, "For Honor," 239-266.

139. Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors," 175-205; Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall, "Black Soldiers, Native Soldiers: Meanings of Military Service in the Spanish American Colonies," in *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Matthew Restall, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 15-52. Juan Manuel Ramírez, "Sowing Wheat," 197-219.

citizenship.”¹⁴⁰ Africans were respected and valued soldiers, whose expert swordsmanship and horse riding skills enabled them to circumvent some aspects of the Iberian politics of difference.¹⁴¹ As with many other Black Africans, Antón Zape was well-aware of the opportunities he could attain through military services to the Crown. Indeed, his request to bear arms may indicate his desire to publicly display his identity as a loyal vassal to the Crown and defender of the *Res Publica*. Since military services were the most prominent acts of loyalty and engagement with the kingdom’s civic community, Antón’s right to bear arms displayed his brilliant services, honor, and rightful subjecthood in sixteenth-century Panama.¹⁴²

By requesting a license to bear arms, Antón was acting as a rightful vassal of the king who followed legal and administrative channels. Though his application no longer remains in the archive, the commentary surrounding it reveals that he understood himself to embody *calidad* and honor in colonial society and that he had arguments and proofs to demonstrate his honored personhood before the imperial administration. His claim demonstrates that he saw himself as virtuous and honored as any Spaniard and likewise deserved this privilege for his services to the Crown, his descent, and his honorable life. More importantly, it shows that people of African descent could mobilize and embody the same martial and masculine honor of Iberian noble conception. They were publicly sanctioned by the administration as such, thereby preventing mistreatment and discrimination from local authorities and colonial society caused by Iberian racial ideology.

Although Antón’s *memorial* and request for the license has disappeared, his rationale, as well as those of many other people of African descent, must have employed the Spanish rhetoric of honor, mobilizing notions of loyalty, service, decent lifestyle, honesty, marriage, Christianity, notable ancestry, and *calidad* as the foundations for their claims.¹⁴³ Antón had loyally served his enslaver and the king for decades in the exploration of the Solomon Islands and the Second Bayano War. His military records must have been the core of his application, as licenses to bear arms were explicitly associated with armed services and the position of nobility as the guardians of society.¹⁴⁴ Antón must have argued that he was already familiar with the martial arts and that he had carried arms before in these military campaigns, therefore

140. Vinson and Restall, “Black Soldiers, Native Soldiers,” 17.

141. Kate Lowe, “The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17-47. Manuel Olmedo, “In Search of the Black Fencer: Race and Martial Arts Discourse in Early Modern Iberia,” in *Trajectories of Empire: Transhispanic Reflections on the African Diaspora*, ed. Jerome Branche, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2022), 46-78.

142. Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations*, 7.

143. Scott K. Taylor, *Honor and Violence in Golden Age Spain*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-16. Robert C. Schwaller, “For Honor,” 239-266.

144. Manuel Olmedo, “In Search,” 46-78. Robert C. Schwaller, “For Honor,” 239-266.

manifesting a virtuous use of them in the empire's defense. With a license to bear arms, Antón also proclaimed his willingness to again defend the king once granted the necessary tools to properly serve his Majesty as a knight.¹⁴⁵

Antón also must have stated that he was a married man with a respectable Christian family and a wife who, as he had, legally obtained her manumission; both maintained a virtuous relationship and household. He might have argued for the license to defend his family as the *Paterfamilias*. He certainly stated that as a Christian man, he was a virtuous fighter who attended his spiritual duties as vassal of a Catholic prince. Antón may have even stated that he had Old Christian ancestry. Although Iberians generally considered Africans as foreigners whose personhood was marked by a stateless and non-Christian identity¹⁴⁶ and by their forceful capture and transportation to the Americas, Antón would have certainly stated that he was a fervent Catholic who converted to Christianity right after his arrival or even before his embarkment in West Africa.¹⁴⁷ As Chloe Ireton has demonstrated, many individuals of African ancestry successfully negotiated with the imperial administration for licenses to travel across the empire and were sanctioned as rightful Old Christians for their Blackness, which acted as an objective mark of their pure Christian origin in Africa.¹⁴⁸ As they did, Antón may have stated that he was originally from Sierra Leone, a region already colonized by Iberians by the time he arrived in the Americas, where Christianity dates back the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, Sierra Leone was an area where Islamic influence was weak and Christianity flourished with little resistance.¹⁵⁰ Antón would have argued that he had already proven himself a sincere Christian, that he had already converted by the time he arrived in the Americas, or even that his ancestors embraced Christianity long time ago.¹⁵¹ Along with military experience, services to the Crown, Christian ancestry, and an honorable lifestyle, Antón would have argued for personal and moral qualities, presenting himself as a brave, honest, sincere, peaceful, trustworthy, and hardworking individual who risked his life in defense of Spanish sovereignty over the Americas.¹⁵²

Indeed, Antón's *calidad* was already proven and publicly sanctioned by the king through the granting of the annual economic pension that Antón would receive for

145. Joane Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 148.

146. María Elena Martínez, "The Black Blood," 479-520.

147. John Thornton, *Africa*, 235-272. James H. Sweet, *Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004), 87-161, 191-217.

148. Chloe Ireton, "They are Blacks," 579-612.

149. Chepas N. Omenyo, "Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone," in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 201-213.

150. Herber S. Klein, *The Atlantic*, 62. P. E. H. Hair, "Christian Influences in Sierra Leone before 1787," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 27, 1, (1997), 3-14.

151. María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical*, 160.

152. Robert C. Schwaller, "For Honor," 239-266.

life, which would provide him the means to live decently according to his *calidad*. In the Iberian world, economic pensions served in society both as a means of procuring economic resources and as a social marker of public respectability.¹⁵³ Pensions were both a monetary and social reward since in Iberian corporate society each member of the social pyramid had to represent and live in accordance with their place in society. Representing their status was an essential part of people's *calidades* and honor, which had to be permanently maintained and defended through lifelong claims and performance.¹⁵⁴ Historians have explained the important difference between “essence and exercise” in Spanish Iberian society, as it was not enough to be respected, honored, and noble; it was equally important for these virtues to be publicly demonstrated.¹⁵⁵ Spanish vassals extensively petitioned the king for economic pensions based on their services and the nobility of their lineage to live in accordance with their *calidades*, to varying degrees. By granting Antón a pension of 50 gold pesos, a considerable amount in sixteenth-century Panamá, the Crown was publicly declaring that Antón enjoyed a privileged status and deserved to live decently as an honorable person.¹⁵⁶ The license to bear arms came to further expand and endorse the official sanction of Antón's *calidad* by offering him yet another way to socially represent his position in colonial society as a free person, a vassal of the king who embodied dignity and masculine honor. This license and economic pension offered Antón the platform to habitually show that he embodied honor and *calidad*, and that he was a respected member of society.

CONCLUSIONS

Antón Zape's hard-fought struggle to achieve justice, freedom, and reward in sixteenth-century Panama offers a window through which to analyze the plurality and multivalent Black experiences in the Spanish Atlantic world. Despite his Blackness and enslaved status, Antón was not deprived of opportunities to negotiate his status and achieve freedom through meritorious royal service. His military participation in the Second Bayano War proved to be a major factor by which the imperial administration viewed him as a loyal vassal. Antón's military services provided excellent credentials with which to sustain his claims for freedom in a “language of alliance to colonial rule.”¹⁵⁷ By fiercely fighting against Maroon

153. Rocío Quispe-Agnoli, *Nobles de Papel: Identidades oscilantes y genealogías borrosas en los descendientes de la realeza Inca*, (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2016), 60-64.

154. Lyman L. Johnson and Sonya L.-Rivera, “Introduction,” in *The Faces*, 1-17. Joane Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 34.

155. Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 34. Ruth Hill, “Between Black and White: A Critical Race Theory Approach to Caste Poetry in the Spanish New World,” *Comparative Literature*, 59, 4, (2007), 269-293.

156. Robert C. Schwaller, *Géneros de Gente*, 17-50.

157. Ann Twinam, *Purchasing*, 57.

and English forces, Antón demonstrated that he was a valuable member of the colonial society, as he was fulfilling his citizen duty of defending the state.¹⁵⁸

An analysis of Antón's career reveals the array of strategies that racially diverse vassals employed to safeguard their interests before imperialism. Following his own conceptions of freedom and his certainty that he deserved to be manumitted after years of valiant service, he struggled to be liberated.¹⁵⁹ He exploited his vast and meritorious records and employed his knowledge on canon and civil law to climb to a prominent position in his negotiations for freedom and rewards.¹⁶⁰ His services and honorable conduct forced the administration and his enslaver to manumit him, making Antón the measure of his enslaver's reputation before the Spanish monarch. Antón pushed against the limits of colonialism and the authority of slaveholders and made imperial institutions defend his rights, demonstrating the pragmatic vision of the administration and the crown's need to reward vassals across the whole empire regardless their racial, ethnic, or social backgrounds to maintain sovereignty over a region where Spaniards were the vast minority.

Since Antón did not even need to litigate against his enslaver at court, his case reveals the complexity and politics of manumission in colonial Spanish America as an intricate space of negotiation between various actors, institutions, and interests where the administration often allied with slaves against their enslavers and forced manumissions through many strategies and procedures, including coercion. Antón's experience points out the possibility for enslaved Africans to attain their freedom legally by mastering the law and crafting coherent narratives about their honorability, services, and industry. Their value as vassals was undeniable by the State, and royal endorsement spared them the need to claim justice in court since they received it directly from the Crown. Though these unknown cases do not appear in civil cases, their frequency in ordinary imperial administrative documents could number hundreds, suggesting an unstudied avenue of achieving manumission through political negotiation in colonial settings in which enslaved African emerged as agents and main advocates of their own freedom.

Similar to Antón, many African descendants employed a host of strategies to liberate themselves from hostile treatment, demanding that imperial

158. Hervert Klein, "The Free Colored Militia of Cuba, 1568–1868." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 6, 2 (1966): 17-27. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall, "Black Soldiers," 15-52. Ben Vinson III and Stewart R. King, "Introducing the New African Diasporic Military History in Latin America," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 5, 2 (2004), 1-24.

159. Karen B. Graubart, "Pesa más la libertad: Slavery, Legal Claims, and the History of Afro-Latin American Ideas," *William & Mary Quarterly*, vol. 78, 3, (2021), 427-458. Frank T. Proctor, *Damned Notions of Liberty: Slavery, Culture, and Power in Colonial Mexico, 1640-1769*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010). Rachel S. O'Toole, *Bound Lives: Africans, Indians, and the Making of Race in Colonial Peru*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

160. Herman L. Bennett, *Africans*, 14-33, 79-154.

administration reward them against their slave-holder's will. The phenomena explain why certain individuals decided to flee and join Maroon communities to live away from colonialism and even to combat it, while many others remained loyal to the Spanish king and followed the legally established path to manumission. Their decisions responded to their own circumstances and life experiences, contributing to our understanding of the fluidity and diversity of the Black experience during colonialism. The Second Bayano War and the marronage of Panama also offer a window into the unfixed Iberian perceptions of Blackness and the many strategies that people of African descent employed to socially promote during colonialism. Marronage provided Antón Zape an ideal scenario to distinguish himself as an exemplary Black vassal of the king who decided to remain loyal to the king and attain his freedom through legal channels rather than join Maroon forces outside Spanish authority.

Antón was committed to following the established legal paths within colonialism to achieve freedom and vassalage rights under royal authority and protection, supported by the king, who opposed slave-holders.¹⁶¹ Antón's determination to achieve freedom and reward through royal service reveals his will to gain the rights attached to freedom without rejecting the duties and obligations imbricated in Spanish notions of subjecthood and citizenship.¹⁶² This subjectivity implied many obligations but also offered racially diverse vassals a platform to redefine their freedom and subjecthood on their own terms.¹⁶³

Yet, Antón's case boasts one of the most inherent contradictions of Spanish colonial society. While colonial discourses presented Black people as subjects prone to violence and insurrection, in times of military and political turmoil African individuals were considered extremely valuable members of society.¹⁶⁴ This contradiction is revealed by the imperial administration's intermediation to liberate Antón Zape and grant him license to bear arms. The same institutions that fought to prevent racially diverse vassals from accessing Spanish emblems of prestige and honor such as arms circumvented their own legal body to grant meritorious vassals rights exclusively reserved for the Spanish elite. The Crown and the administration were aware of this

161. Tamar Herzog, *Defining*, 161. Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2021), 1-14. Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795-1831*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 1-33. Rachel O'Toole, "'In a War against the Spanish': Andean Protection and African Resistance on the Northern Peruvian Coast," *The Americas* 63, 1 (2006), 19-52.

162. David A. Sartorius, *Ever Faithful*, 10. Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 1-15. Ann Twinam, *Purchasing*, 35, 81-123. María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670-1780*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 285-313, 314-329. Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations*, 1-17; 64-94; 119-141. Norah L. Gharala, *Taxing*, 1-22.

163. Gharala, *Taxing*, 5.

164. Robert C. Schwaller, "For Honor," 239-266.

contradiction. In fact, the ambiguous application of the Iberian politics of difference served as an instrument of global governance. Imperial administrators elevated certain Black Iberians and endowed them with full citizenship to provide a model of conduct that could be emulated and followed by racialized subjects of the king.

Indeed, Antón was not the only enslaved person granted manumission and honors for their combat against the Maroons. Another enslaved African from Nombre de Dios named Pedro Yalongo received royal-sponsored manumission for fighting against English forces and the Maroons in 1595.¹⁶⁵ The king asserted that Pedro should be manumitted because his bravery and services constituted a significant act of loyalty that “could encourage others of his nation to serve [the Crown].”¹⁶⁶ Iberian administrators’ need to integrate and reward exemplary Black Iberians exposes the ineffectiveness of imperial authority in the Americas. In Panama, their decisions to liberate and arm Black Iberians was even more conflicted since Maroons were the biggest threat for Spanish authority in the region. Arming people of African descent while the administration and local elites were fostering a psychosis about the *Negros rebeldes* allied with imperial enemies exposes the great divide between law, ideology, imperial needs, and social understandings.¹⁶⁷

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