

#### *4-The Rebellion of Guatiguana and The First Trans-Atlantic Slave Cargo*

As we have seen before, the Native-Haitians' anger against the invaders was at an all-time high. However, with their experience of the Europeans' firepower, the Native-Haitians knew only too well that they could not face them in a regular battle. They, then, resorted to another solution. In many parts of the island, they managed to capture and kill individual and isolated Spaniards.

At the end of 1494, overwhelmed with grief and anger at the Spaniards' repeated cruelties, the Native-Haitians of the province of Marcorix, led by cacique Guatiguana, rebelled and killed ten Spaniards. An expedition into Marcorix quickly defeated the Native-Haitian army despite their numerical superiority: the thunder from the gunfire, the horse and the dogs quickly forced the Native-Haitians into complete disarray. The Spaniards brought about 1,600 prisoners back to Isabela.

Torres had returned from Spain with provisions for the Spaniards of Hispaniola, but there was nothing to load the ships with on their return to Spain. The Native-Haitians, Columbus decided, would do it. They were not Caribs and could not be accused of cannibalism, but that distinction did not bother the Admiral. Only 500 of the prisoners could fit on the ships. An eyewitness (Michele de Cuneo)<sup>17</sup> recorded the event:

"[...] We loaded the said caravels with five hundred and fifty of the best on February 17, 1495. As to the remainder, there was given an order that whoever wished might take whatever he liked; and it was thus done. And when everyone was thus provided, there were left over about four hundred who were turned loose to go wherever they wished. Among them were many women with babies at the breast. In order to better escape and fearing we might seize them again, these women abandoned their children indiscriminately and took flight as persons in desperation. They fled so far as to remove themselves from our town of Isabela by as much as seven or eight days across the largest mountains and rivers, so that it would be impossible to have them again."<sup>18</sup>

Two hundred of the Native-Haitians on board never made it to Spain. They died during the trip and were flung overboard. The rest were put up for sale in Seville. It was the first slave cargo to cross the Atlantic; that makes *Columbus the first trans-Atlantic slave-trader*.

With this operation, Columbus had tried to kill two birds with one stone. On one hand, the slaves would replace the gold he could not send to the Spanish Sovereigns; on the other hand, the angry Spaniards, provided with slaves and sex-

slaves would, he hoped, complain less. They didn't. The complaints continued, feeding a permanent atmosphere of discontent in the Spanish community in Hispaniola. For the time being, however, the Admiral was more concerned with establishing a tight control over Hispaniola. To control the gold, Columbus had to control the Natives first. They were the working force that could extract it if it were to be extracted, and were the ones most likely to resist. That implied taking Caonabo out of the picture. That was Columbus's next order of business.



Caonabo prisoner

### 5-Eliminating Caonabo

Eliminating the king of the Maguana turned out to be very easy. Given Caonabo's well-established reputation as a fierce and strong leader, it was not by force but by ruse that the Spaniards did it, using their understanding of Taino culture. Accompanied by only nine or ten horsemen, Hojeda rode all the way to Niti, the village where Caonabo was living and announced to Caonabo that he had been sent by the Admiral, the "one who is above all Christians"<sup>19</sup> and that he had brought him some *turey*\* as a present. To the Native-Haitians who believed these strangers to be from Heaven, the *turey*\* was anything (especially any metal) that was from heaven. Caonabo accepted to receive him.

Once in the presence of Maguana's Cacique, Hojeda kneeled down, kissed his hands and instructed his companions to do the same. He then explained to Caonabo that the *turey*\* he had brought was very powerful and was only used on solemn occasions by the kings of Castile\*. He then begged Caonabo to come to the river to bathe.<sup>20</sup> Caonabo, impressed by the present and having no experience of that level of duplicity, agreed.

At the end of these rituals, Caonabo did not receive his *turey*\*. Instead, Hojeda took him aside and made him ride his horse. With Caonabo mounted behind him, Hojeda rode his horse smoothly, going back and forth, each time going a little farther. On their guard at first, Caonabo's bodyguards soon relaxed, amused by this apparently innocent game. Hojeda continued with his little game for a while then suddenly,

the Spaniards took off at full speed. Many days later, Hojeda presented the Admiral with the great Caonabo, in chains and prisoner. The *turey*\* that had attracted him so much was nothing but a pair of well-polished handcuffs.

Caonabo spent some time in jail in Isabela before Columbus sent him to Spain. He never reached his destination. The first freedom fighter of the New World died in the oceans as the ship carrying him perished in the seas.

The capture of Caonabo solved only one of the many issues Columbus had to face. Even with Caonabo out of the way, the gold of the Cibao did not start flowing in and Columbus still had to provide the Spanish Crown with some return on its investment in the enterprise of the Indies.

### ***6-The Battle of The Vega Real***

In the following months, the Columbus brothers took the time to pacify Hispaniola. On March 24, 1495, Christopher and Bartolome Columbus set out from Isabela City. The servile Guacanagarí and his men were following their masters.

Columbus had taken with him about 200 foot soldiers and horsemen and 20 ferocious greyhounds. Besides the horses, these dogs were the most terrifying to the Natives who went naked and were, therefore, vulnerable to their teeth.<sup>21</sup>

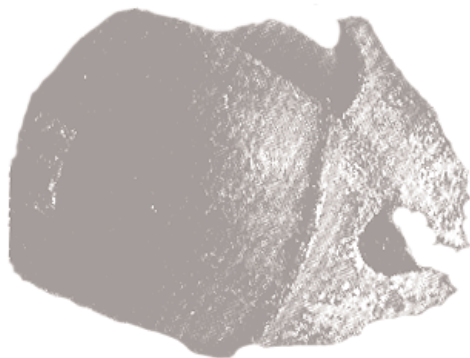
Caonabo's brothers were determined to avenge him and, in the Vega-Real, close to a hundred thousand Native-Haitians were waiting for the Spaniards. But, "in less time than it takes to say a Credo\*", the [Native-Haitians] were run through with spears, dismembered with swords, cut in two, devoured by the dogs, and a great number burned alive". (Las Casas) The Natives quickly dispersed into a general *sauve-qui-peut*\*. The Spaniards then gratified themselves with an orgy of death playing to see who could best cut a Native in two with a single swing of his sword

After this "victory", Columbus and his brother roamed the island for almost a year, waging war against any Native-Haitian community that was not showing perfect obedience to their rule. Their offensive struck especially the kingdom of Caonabo whose subjects had proved to be the most courageous and the most adamant\* resisters to the European invaders. That campaign brought the Native-Haitians to their knees. Despite the justice of their cause, the technological superiority of the Spaniards offered no chance of a military solution to their plight. Hispaniola then was so well subdued that a Spaniard could go by himself anywhere in the island without any risk of being attacked.

## Chapter 4

### **THE PACIFICATION: RESISTANCE AND DEATH**

*By the roads of sand  
They came on their horses  
These conquerors fallen from the heavens  
Looking for their god  
The pure metal and its yellow gleam*  
—A. Phelps, *Mon Pays Que Voici*



*A hawksbell*

#### **1-Haiti Under Control**

Now in firm control of at least part of the island, Columbus got down to the only business he had on his mind: gold. "The Admiral imposed on all inhabitants of the Cibao, the Vega Real and others living near the mines that each one, fourteen years old or more, should pay gold of the measure of a Flemish hawksbell every three months" (Las Casas). To ensure that no one escape the tribute\*, the Natives were forced to wear a disk around their neck to show that they

were paying tribute\*. The eastern part of Hispaniola was under a heavy yoke. By then, about seven forts had been built throughout the island (see Map M-4, page 44) and the Spaniards' savagery was too well known for any Native Haitian to even think of challenging this measure.

The Spaniards were clever enough not to attempt to control the native population directly. Instead, they used the existing native political system. They put pressure on the Caciques themselves (especially Guarionex), who in turn pressured the sub-caciques and the village chiefs. Unwilling but powerless, they all cooperated.

A census of the Native-Haitian population was taken to ensure that they would not cheat (It was the first census of the New World). It revealed a population of