

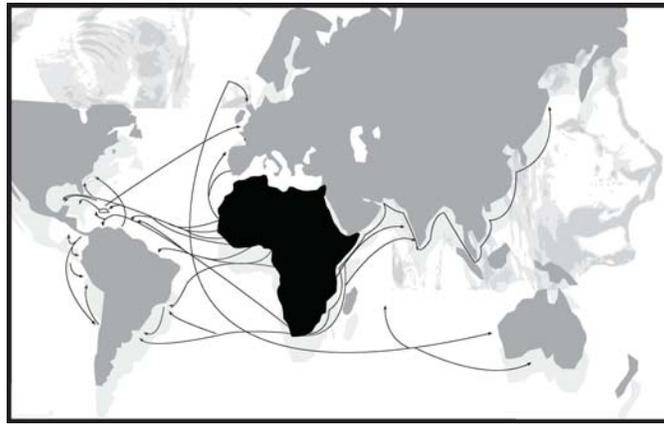
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*The Problems and Challenges of Research and Writing on Africans and their
Descendants in Colonial Cartagena de Indias:
A Research Report*

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Abstract

Nicole von Germeten, "The Problems and Challenges of Research and Writing on Africans and their Descendants in Colonial Cartagena de Indies: A Research Report"

This paper is a work-in-progress summarizing the kinds of documents that can be used to learn about the history of Africans in colonial Cartagena de Indias. Some of the sources described here include the work of Alonso de Sandoval, a seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary who worked with African slaves, and documents related to the Cartagena leper colony. The paper's emphasis is on analysis of Afro-Cartagenan's testimonies given during the beatification process of Saint Peter Claver. These testimonies may offer a window into local African and Creole conceptions of heroism and miracles.

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This paper will focus on *the problems involved in writing the history of identity and difference of peoples who for the most part did not write their own*, applying this concern to my current work in progress, a book manuscript engaged with the history of colonial Cartagena de Indias. This is a long term project and I am currently at the research stage. Instead of writing a formal paper, this paper will summarize some of the documents I am using, and ask conference participants for their input on the usefulness of these sources for writing a general history of colonial Cartagena, with a focus on Afro-Cartagenans, religion and society.

When I began this project, I hoped to locate some evidence of the religious and social lives of Afro-Cartagenans in the colonial era. I felt that secondary sources already available provide a good sense of more general topics related to Cartagena such as economic history (especially contraband and the slave trade), elite history, military history, political history and even rebel settlements. However, due to the dearth of notarial, parish and other ecclesiastical records, I only find traces of Afro-Cartagenan lives in criminal cases appealed to the *audiencia* in Santa Fe de Bogotá, inquisition cases, the canonization process of Peter Claver, the published work of Alonso de Sandoval, published censuses, the records of the Hospital de San Lázaro, and a few other scattered documents stored in the Archive of the Indies and the Colombian Archivo General de la Nación.

Due to these limitations, I decided that I could no longer focus this book on Africans, but instead must take a more general look at Spanish imperial policies of exclusion and inclusion in Cartagena. The emphasis of the book had to change to themes such as fear of invasions of various kinds and the selected exclusion of Africans *and* other groups and individuals from outside Spain and its dominions and people of non-Catholic religious traditions, especially Jews and Protestants. All of the available sources clearly and readily present how the Spanish religious and civil authorities formulated their vision of Africans, but provide little voice for Africans themselves. The sources seem to force me to concentrate more on Spanish institutions than the experiences of Spanish subjects or, more interesting, a more nuanced look at the Spanish vision of Africans in Cartagena.

Thus, due to source limitations, must I repeat viceregal visions and marginalize Africans in Cartagena, despite the fact that they made up a large percentage of the population? I hope I can find a creative thesis to pursue – especially one related to the dominant symbolic use of African slaves in the hagiography of Saint Peter Claver and the work of Alonso de Sandoval. This paper will describe the sources I have encountered thus far for the study Africans and their descendants in Cartagena. I hope that commentators can suggest creative ways to approach this history and how I might gather together more ephemeral references to Afro-Cartagenans in order to provide a sense of their experience in colonial Cartagena.

Alonso de Sandoval's 1627 *Naturaleza, policia sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos, disciplina i catechismo evangélico de todos etíopes*

The most accessible sources for the history of Africans in colonial Cartagena are the printed primary sources written by Alonso de Sandoval [1627's *Naturaleza, policia sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos, disciplina i catechismo evangélico de todos etíopes*, published in Seville, and 1647's *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*, published in Madrid]¹ and the canonization process of Pedro Claver.² Some scholars dismiss these works as Jesuit propaganda, propagated to counter accusations that the Company only worked with the colonial elite. Other scholars often focus on the fact that he did not make an outright denunciation of slavery. A deeper analysis into the entire work reveals that Sandoval set up several variables that determined the morality of slavery, making rules and standards for slave traders, owners and priests who had enslaved parishioners. Sandoval says that slavery is only moral and justifiable if these conditions are met, and he makes it extremely clear that they are not. Therefore, readers must assume that Sandoval believes slavery is immoral.

¹ Only the 1627 edition has been reprinted in the twentieth century. See Angel Valtierra, ed., *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* (Bogotá, 1956) and Enriqueta Vila Vilar, ed., *Un tratado sobre la esclavitud* (Madrid, 1986). Due to the titles, scholars have been quite confused about which version has appeared in the twentieth century. There is currently no modern edition of the 1647 work.

² *Proceso de beatificación y canonización de San Pedro Claver*, ed. and trans. by Anna María Splendiani and Tulio Aristizábal (Bogotá, 2002).

Beyond judging Sandoval as a possible proto-abolitionist is the book's general theme – that the central Jesuit purpose is to work with *Aethiopians* – and Sandoval applies this label far and wide, including all of Africa and most of Asia. Sandoval broadens and extends the label of *Aethiopian* to apply to all non-European peoples that have been in contact with the Jesuits, generally the populations of regions touched by Spanish and Portuguese imperialist goals. On an international level, Sandoval formulates a symbolic vision of *Aethiopians* as the most important new converts to Catholicism.

Sandoval's 1627 work is divided into four books.³ The first book talks about the world's geography, discussion of why some Africans have darker skin, exploration of the wonders and marvels of Africa (influence by Pliny and medieval sources), a north-to-south journey through the languages and cultures of West Africa and a discussion of the general morality of slavery and the abuses of the slave ships. Book One also explores what is known of other peoples Sandoval views as *Aethiopian*, including residents of the islands of the coast of India, the Philippines and the Moluccas. Book One touches on East Africa, Mozambique, Malabar and Socotra. It concludes with a list of some historic great African Christians and saints.

Book Two discusses the sufferings Africans endure as slaves, how their masters must help alleviate their suffering (especially through allowing them to be full members of the Church), and why the ministry to African slaves in Cartagena is so valuable and beneficial, especially for priests who take it on. Sandoval points to the legendary apostolic work of Saint Thomas as an example of a great preacher and converter. Book Two ends with an exploration of all the charitable virtues priests put in to practice by working with Africans, and this practice paves their way to heaven.

Book Three is mainly practical, discussing all the methods Sandoval has developed for catechizing and baptizing Africans in Cartagena. In this Book, he criticizes the baptisms slaves receive in Africa. The final Book, according to Sandoval, is dedicated to his Jesuit readers, and presents a theological vision of the Company, with Loyola symbolically

³ See below for explanation of the differences in the 1647 edition.

represented as the sun and Xavier as the moon. Sandoval ends by showing that Church leaders support the Cartagena mission, and includes a few anecdotes and comments on the entire colonial project and where his African ministry fit into it.

We can learn about Afro-Cartagenans from the complex presentation of Africans in Sandoval's publications and Claverian sources, never forgetting their inherent Jesuit self-promotion, but meanwhile learning about such topics as Africans' responses to Christianity. Some of the more interesting sections of Sandoval's work are his descriptions of African involvement and dedication to Christianity. I argue that we should trust that Sandoval and the Claver *proceso* did not invent the African reactions to Jesuit catechization they report, although the motives for their statements and outward actions are open to discussion and interpretation.

Sandoval often describes the expressions of great joy that he witnesses when he is working with Africans. Discussing a "woman from Cacheu [Guinea-Bissau]" Sandoval says: "When I baptized her son, she embraced me a thousand times, indicating how happy she was to see him Christian" (Sandoval, 1627, Book Four, Chapter XIII).⁴ Describing another woman, he writes: "...she asked me to baptize her. She prepared for it and received it with the greatest joy that she had ever felt in her life" (Sandoval, 1627, Book Four, Chapter XIII). Sandoval also often received physical affection. After baptizing a man, he reports "Three days later, he met me in the street. He approached me, grabbed my hand, and embraced me joyfully" (Sandoval, 1627, Book Four, Chapter XIV). Public displays were not uncommon:

[One baptized African] feels so much gratitude for the benefits of baptism that to this day, whenever he sees me, he stops before me, falls on his knees and claps his hands as a sign of joy. Then he asks me for my hands and puts them over his eyes, and then he gets up and goes on his way.

With the help of five interpreters, I baptized another who was about to die. This man was so grateful to me for having saved his life, that each time he met me on

⁴ All translations are mine, based on the as yet untitled English translation of *De Instauranda Aethiopum salute* (Bogotá, 1956), forthcoming by Hackett Publishers. Since I do not know the page numbers for this forthcoming book, I have noted the section and chapter numbers.

the street, he approached me, his face full of laughter, and bowed to me twice to show his gratitude, so deeply that I felt inspired to laugh and praise the Lord, because he acknowledged the help I gave him in his own unique style (Sandoval, 1627, Book Three, Chapter III).

While catechizing slaves who have recently arrived from Africa, Sandoval explains that many receive his message enthusiastically:

Another man was so happy when he heard what I told him about the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, that he kept clapping his hands to show the joyfulness in his heart and the fact that he no longer feared death (Sandoval, 1627, Book Three, Chapter III).

Sandoval's purpose in describing these anecdotes is clear – to show that Africans were capable of becoming good Christians and it was worth a priest's time and effort to catechize them. But what African attitudes can we read into these descriptions?

Sandoval provides a few glimpses at the African interpretation of Catholic practice in his descriptions of religious societies and festivals. Not unlike African confraternal organizations throughout the Americas, these sister/brotherhoods were community-strengthening organizations where Africans could help each other. Although these organizations were nominally Catholic, they operated on a sliding scale, ranging from apparently close adherence to Hispanic practice to celebration of African communal ties, at least from Sandoval's perspective.

Sandoval mentions African fraternal organizations three times in his 1627 book. In Book Two, Chapter II, Sandoval explains the charitable purpose of the brotherhoods:

If a slave dies, the master should bury him, but they do not. I am not talking about those who die in the slave ships. After arriving here, slaves will not be buried unless their relatives provide money to pay for their burial. People from their caste [ethnolinguistic group] will collect donations, and bring the money together over the dead body. They also depend on their brotherhoods to bury them, even if they are very ladino and have lived many years in the same house.

Obviously here Sandoval rates the brotherhoods as helping their members in an act of necessary charity. He also favorably refers to a Jesuit black sodality of the Virgin Mary

located in Bogotá when he describes a miraculous vision experienced by a devout female member. In Book Two, Chapter VIII, Sandoval relates that this woman saw the Virgin and the child Jesus with an appearance resembling the image honored by the sodality.

On a more judgmental note, in the section of the book dealing with how to extract valid confessions from African slaves, Sandoval notes the practice of transvestism he has witnessed in public festivals:

I have noted in this city of Cartagena, and even in other places, that some black nations celebrate festivals by having men dress as women. This infernal plague is not widespread but it is still serious, even if it is only practiced rarely. Even some slaves who are already Christian participate (Book Three, Chapter XIX).

Sandoval clearly believes that some African brotherhoods promote some practices considered unacceptable to his set of Catholic morals, emphasizing African rituals, not Christianization or charity. Unless I find something in inquisition cases, these three examples are the only information I have on African brotherhoods in Cartagena. Confraternity records, usually found in parish or diocesan archives, can be one of the best available sources for learning about African social, religious and even political and economic life in colonial Latin America, but unfortunately so far I have not succeeded in locating any extant records of this kind.

Sandoval's publications and Claver's *proceso* provide us with an understanding of how Europeans fitted Africans into a multivalent Baroque Catholic worldview. Africans had a uniquely sacred status in Baroque Latin America – their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy granted them symbolic importance to devout Europeans.⁵ This connects to Sandoval's overall purpose of creating a comprehensive, international Jesuit mission to the *Aethiopians* of the world. Keeping this goal in mind, Sandoval presents the African mission in contrast to the sixteenth-century European/Franciscan vision of Indians as the ideal Christians:

Everyone knows that the Spaniards abused the Indians, so that in many provinces there are very few Indians left. In other places, they have disappeared entirely.

⁵ See Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, (Gainesville: 2006), Chapter One.

The blacks came here to replace these Indians. Huge numbers of slaves come here to work on Spanish land and to mine gold to make the Spanish rich. The slaves sustain the Spanish through their hard work, sweat and industry. But instead of sheltering them, curing their illnesses and defending them, because slaves bring them wealth and honor, the Spanish abandon them (Sandoval, 1627, Book Two, Chapter II).

Many churchmen work to bring Christianity to the Indians, and I envy them for working on such a glorious task, but their enthusiasm also discourages me, because our work with the blacks is just as important. No one speaks in their defense and no one runs to help them. I believe I am not exaggerating in saying that the poor blacks are more desperate than the Indians (Sandoval, 1627, Book Two, Chapter VI).

It is very true that our principal function in the Indies is to work with Indians, as stated in our constitutions. But it is also absolutely certain that very important work must be done for the black slaves that serve us in these parts. Without doubt, the purpose of the Company of Jesus here is to help the natives, but we should also help the blacks, especially in the places where there are no Indians. After all, black slaves came here to supplement the lack of Indians to serve us here on earth. They are also here for us to help them spiritually. They are our slaves and not free people like the Indians. Therefore, we must make a greater effort to help them because, as I have clearly shown, the blacks are in much greater need than the Indians. It is more difficult to instruct the blacks than the Indians and thus they offer the hope of a greater reward. Our sacred Company has already truthfully declared that it equally values working for both the salvation of the blacks and the Indians, and all the ecclesiastical privileges that are conceded to the Indians are also conceded to the blacks and vice versa (Sandoval, Book Four, Chapter XV).

Sandoval's contrast between Africans slaves and Indians indicates that he envisions African slaves as having crucial symbolic importance in Baroque Catholicism due to the suffering in their lives and their status at the lowest level of the social hierarchy. This point is emphasized repeatedly at the beginning of Book Two, where Sandoval entitles Chapter I "The Blacks Suffer more Misery than any other Men." Chapter II pursues the theme of "The Evils of Nature and Fortune Endured by the Blacks" by describing slaves' work and living arrangements. Sandoval concludes this theme with Chapter III on "The Blacks Spiritual Suffering." The points he makes at the beginning of Book Two are meant to motivate Jesuits and other clerical readers to join his ministry. Thus, in several different ways, Sandoval promotes an African ministry as the appropriate one for Jesuits

in the Americas, in contrast to the sixteenth-century mendicant focus on proselytizing to American Indians.⁶

Sandoval's 1647 *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*

Analysis of the differences between Sandoval's 1627 and 1647 books shows how Sandoval's vision of Africans and how they fit into his worldview changed over time. Sandoval's second book on Africans, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*, includes much more material on Africa and many more chapters devoted to the history of slavery and the morality of its current practice. I will describe the 1647 sections to show how they differ from the summary of the 1627 book, presented above. In *De instauranda* (1647), Book One does some of what Book One did in 1627 – Sandoval describes Africa and the African peoples. In this case, he provides much more detail, especially about Luanda. He also dedicates several chapters, not just one, to the issue of slavery. Sandoval ends Book One with a call for slave masters to treat slaves differently, and mentions the “grave harm” of slavery. Book Two turns to his broad conception of *Aethiopia*, including East Africa, Egypt and Asia. Many chapters here discuss the Apostle Thomas, making this ministry have a closer link to apostolic preaching and thus a greater spiritual value. Book Two expands these sections that were originally in Book One of the 1627 edition in describing *Aethiopians* that are not part of the slave trade but are part of Jesuit international expansion. Sandoval also includes letters and accounts of Jesuit experiences in the narrower geographic region of Ethiopia as we think of it today. Book Three of the 1647 edition is also an expansion of Book One, in this case exploring the “marvels, monstrous things and saintly people” of Africa in much greater detail. Clearly this later work was meant to present all available knowledge on Africa and the *Aethiopians* of the world.

Thus, Sandoval removed all practical instruction in how to catechize African slaves present in his 1627 work. His goals for this work were a summary of European knowledge of Africa, a more extensive discussion of the morality of slavery and a stress on Jesuit missions in Asia, without focusing on Africa itself or America. This changing

⁶ Of course, José de Acosta's work on indigenous cultures had a strong influence on Sandoval.

emphasis fits the historical change taking place in Africa and Catholicism at the time. The Jesuits decreased their presence in Africa itself in the 1620s and 1630s. Of course Sandoval would not have perceived this change when he was preparing his book in the 1610s and early 1620s. By the publication of the second edition, Sandoval would have understood that the Capuchin order, promoted by the new institution of the *Propaganda Fide* in Rome, now dominated African missions. He might have also become more pessimistic about Catholic missions in Africa due to the continuation of Islamic expansion and the weakening of the Portuguese connection to central African rulers. Jesuits, including those with Portuguese royal support, had suffered devastating setbacks and violence in this era. Sandoval also might have felt less defensive about establishing a Jesuit identity through mission activity with African slaves in the Americas. He was also clearly fascinated by collecting more information on African peoples, languages, customs and beliefs. Because no modern edition of Sandoval's 1647 work exists, I can pursue these ideas much further when I am able to access the rare copies of this book in the United States.

Pedro Claver Canonization Process

As documented in Table 1, 35 Afro-Cartagenans testified in the canonization process for Peter Claver, surely among the largest collections of African testimonies from seventeenth-century Cartagena. However, hagiographic literature is among the more problematic and challenging in finding a sense of African identity or self-expression. On the other hand, I believe this source is another one that offers interesting insights if studied with care and creativity. If nothing else, the *proceso* offers a great deal of proof that Jesuits and other Catholics in Cartagena and beyond adamantly believed that working with Africans offered a path to sainthood, paved with the words and deeds of Africans themselves.

First, the problems with the *proceso*: the focus is on the deeds of Claver, sublimating the actions and original words of the witnesses. There is no need for another catalogue of the saint's achievements! Secondly, in the "Objections" to the *proceso*, the notorious

“devil’s advocate” himself, the official counterpoint to Post-Tridentine canonization processes, argued that the testimonies in this case were two biased. He argued this because many of the witnesses to Claver’s deeds, miracles and saintliness were slaves in the College of the Company of Jesus, and many of these people specifically noted they felt affection towards Claver. More crucial for our concern is the devil’s advocate’s observation that the Jesuit and companion of Claver, Nicolás González, seemed to have an undue influence on the testimonies. González knew more than any other witness and over and over again gives the most detailed accounts (*Proceso*, 538, 541, 542). González was also the *procurador* of the case, so he was leading it *and* providing information, a conflict of interest. Lastly, the printed *proceso* is a 400-page summary of the testimonies which does not include question and answer sessions or any other clue as to why many witnesses repeat the same testimony given by González. One not entirely satisfactory or convincing way to address the influence of González would be to try to find places in the testimonies where a witness seems to provide a more original or personal story.

I believe that it may be possible to learn much about Africans by using their testimonies in the Claver *proceso*. As the chart indicates, Africans and Afro-Cartagenas testified on a broad range of issues. Some, especially Andres Sacabuche and Claver’s other interpreters, offered many intimate details about Claver’s life. Although their testimony was clearly organized in some way by González, we cannot discount the fact that *Africans themselves* must have formulated some important elements and anecdotes of the Claver hagiography. Comparing and contrasting Claver’s *proceso* to other similar saints’ documentation, especially Martin de Porres, might argue for or against the unusual nature of some of the stories. On the other hand, the ways in which Claver was made into a hero with special supernatural powers, might represent universal conceptions of a heroic figure. This does not detract from the fact that he was a heroic figure *created by Africans* in colonial Cartagena. I argue that we gain a glimpse into how Afro-Cartagenans conceived of a heroic, supernatural personage.

For example, one of the favorite Claverian miracles repeated by modern hagiographies was the miracle of repairing dropped eggs, told by a 24-year old free black woman called

Isabel de Mier (*Proceso*, 433-434). This miracle is recounted only once (not numerous times, like many other anecdotes) in a section of the *proceso* dealing with “various other miracles” that does not seem over-choreographed by González. Isabel reportedly said that she knew Father Claver – he was her godfather at her confirmation and her confessor. One day she was walking with another freedwoman

who was taking a basket of eggs to sell at Carnaval. A *chapelón* (someone recently arrived from Spain) shoved her and the eggs fell and broke. The woman began to cry and pray fervently to God, in fear of her mistress who would cruelly punish her for this. At that moment, Father Claver came down the street and Isabel knelt before him to kiss his hands. The father asked her, seeing the other black woman crying, “what’s this, *hija?*” Isabel answered, “a *chapelón* made her basket of eggs fall and broke them. She is afraid of her mistress’s punishment.” Then the Father approached the basket of eggs, he straightened them with his stick, the eggs joined together again, and he put them in the basket. All were joined as if they had never been broken... (*Proceso*, 434).

Several other miracles stories of this kind appear in the *proceso*. A sixty-year old freedwoman testified that when she put an ex voto on Claver’s sepulcher, a chronic pain and inflammation in her arm disappeared. Two other freedwomen, aged 46 and 60, testified that a portrait of the saint cured a young girl dying from an asthma attack. Several free and enslaved men and women, all over age fifty, testified to Claver’s prophetic gifts. In terms of power over nature, a sixty-year old freedman testified that Claver closed a volcanic crater that had appeared near a highway outside of the city and an elderly woman said that Claver had resuscitated six slaves when a tree struck by lightning knocked them unconscious (*Proceso*, 417, 420). Marcela, an elderly *negra libre*, said Claver cured her son of gangrene using only his saliva. A freedwoman and her two slaves testified that Claver resuscitated an unbaptized slave by feeding him an egg (424-426). Close analysis of how these miracles are described and vocalized might reveal more about storytelling and local legends and myths popular among Africans in Cartagena.⁷

⁷ I hope to work on other aspects of the exchange on information and reputations in my general work on Colonial Cartagena.

Table 1: Afro-Cartagena Testimony in Pedro Claver's *Proceso de beatificación*

Name	Description	Age	Issue of Testimony
Ana Maria	slave of Margarita Paravicino	50	miracles after death
Ana Maria de Santa Maria	free black woman	40	miracles after death
Ana Ramirez	free black woman	60	miracles after death
Andres Sacabucho	black from Angola, interpreter	45	baptisms of blacks, public preaching, missions to countryside, penitential practices, hearing confession, controlling public vices, charity, working with sick, charity towards criminals, alms-collecting, humility and charity, poverty, abstinence, devotion to corpse
Angela Biafara	slave in the Jesuit College	60	miracles after death
Antonio Monterato	slave of Captain Juan de Rueda	50	gift of prophesy
Baltazar de la Cruz	slave of Isabel de Urbina	37	hearing confession, poverty
Catalina Angola	slave of Catalina Calvo	60	miracles after death
Diego Folupa	slave in Jesuit College, interpreter	48	missions to countryside, hearing confessions, controlling public vice, charity, working with sick, charity towards criminals, humility, patience, levitation in ecstasy, devotion to corpse
Francisca Alfonsa	free black woman	60	working with sick, gift of prophesy, miracle cure from lightning
Francisca Angola	slave of Mariana Bellido	60	gift of prophesy, miracle cures
Francisca Melgarejo	slave of Maria Magdalena Crespo	21	miracle cure
Francisco de Jesus Yolofo	slave in Jesuit College, interpreter	70	converting heretics, devotion to corpse
Francisco Yolofo	slave in Jesuit College, interpreter	50	baptism of blacks, public preaching, Missions to countryside, penitential practices, controlling public vices, charity, working with sick, charity towards criminals, humility, piety, devotion to corpse
Ignacio Angola	slave in Jesuit College, interpreter	40	baptism of blacks, public preaching, penitential practices, hearing confession, charity, controlling public vices, working with sick, charity towards criminals, humility, piety, patience, abstinence, devotion to corpse
Ignacio Soso	slave in Jesuit College, interpreter	60	public preaching, hearing confession, controlling public vices, charity, working with sick, humility, devotion to corpse
Isabel de Mier	free black woman	24	miraculously repaired broken eggs
Isabel Folupa	slave of Captain Juan de Tejada	38	baptisms of blacks, charity, poverty, devotion to corpse, miracles after death
Isabel Gelis	black slave of Marcelina Gelis	30	miracle cure with eggs
Jacinto de Medina	free black man	60	prophesy, miraculously closed a volcano
Jose Gramajo	free black man	33	missions to countryside, penitential practices

Jose Monzolo	slave in Jesuit College, interpreter	44	baptism of blacks, public preaching, strict observance of rule, hearing confession, charity, working with sick, humility, modesty, patience, devotion to corpse
Juan de Dios	slave in the Hospital	30	converting heretics, working with sick
Juana Franco	free black woman	46	miracles after death
Manuel	black slave in the Jesuit College	26	penitential practices
Manuel de Cabo Verde	slave of Isabel de Urbina	20	baptism of blacks, humility, premonition of death, saved from runaway horse, devotion after death
Manuel Gelis	slave of Marcelina Gelis	22	miracle cure with eggs
Marcela	free black woman	70	miracle cure of gangrene
Marcelina Gelis	free black woman	50	miracle cure with eggs
Maria Angola	slave of Lorenza de los Reyes	60	miracle cure
Maria Carabali	slave of Elena Ferrer de Valmar	60	miracle cure
Maria de Candelaria	slave of Maria Bellido	55	miracle cure, prophesy
Maria de Mendoza	free black woman (Biafara)	61	caring for sick
Mariana de Cabo Verde	slave of Captain Juan de Tejada	22	miracles after death
Rufina Ramirez	free black woman	60	miracles after death

It worth noting that only six of the African testimonies come from people over thirty, and two-thirds of the witnesses are forty or older, respected elders of their day. Do these people represent a kind of keepers of oral history in Cartagena? Obviously the best witnesses would be older individuals, contemporaries of Claver. But witnesses often state that others saw this event or that behavior, but they are now dead so cannot testify. These independent sources tell the stories of a local legend. Perhaps they were influenced by standard hagiographical stories or Claver's local reputation, but this does not mean words were put into their mouths.

In contrast, the seven interpreters, who provided much of the testimony related to Claver's good deeds in life, clearly adhered more closely to the Jesuit ideologies. González may have been able to influence them more directly. Among Africans in Cartagena, these men were elite assistants in constant, direct contact with the Jesuits and Claver himself. For this reason, their testimony has value, both in its presentation of their lives and the very subtle nuances and differences with the official story. For example, in their stories of Claver's methods of catechizing and disciplining slaves, the interpreters stress more of the violence in the stories, images and even physical beatings (*Proceso*, 101, 102, 106, 193). Although this printed primary sources offers several difficulties and

challenges, creative use of Afro-Cartagenan testimonies might yield some revealing insights.

Afro-Cartagenans in Documents relating to the Hospital de San Lázaro

A reasonably extensive documentary record exists for the Hospital of San Lázaro in Cartagena, and this documentation offers a few insights into the world of an even more marginalized group among Africans and their descendants in the city. Colonial understandings of lepers and leprosy fit into more general concerns regarding honor and contamination, especially in terms of impure blood, sexuality, lineage and skin. The conception of honor as a sexual value influenced by physical presentation, including dress and demeanor, but most importantly skin color/quality/texture, obviously meant lepers automatically lacked honor, as did illegitimate or non-white people. Lepers were essentially contaminated or impure and thus lived in colonial society lacking even the slightest trace of honor. Without even the slightest vestige of *limpieza de sangre*, lepers could not compete or strive for honor, nor could they seek it or pretend to have it, as did other colonial subjects who secretly or openly fell short of the standards of *limpieza de sangre*. There was no reason for them to protect their sexual reputations or hide their race. In colonial documents, lepers are not labeled racially – their contaminated, leprous skin trumps race in terms of colonial hierarchies. However, in fact most people publicly recognized as lepers in Cartagena were of African descent.

Throughout the colonial history of the hospital, documents reveal a literal obsession with contagion, drawing on the late medieval belief that leprosy spread through the air and the lepers' breath.⁸ During Peter Claver's lifetime, the lazaretto was located just outside the city gate leaving from the famous Calle de la Media Luna. Witnesses describing Claver's saintly deeds also zealously described the horrific nature of the disease, in their great enthusiasm to show the saint's extreme self-mortification. A typical statement on this subject, made by Nicolás González, Claver's assistant and the most important advocate for his sainthood, is as follows:

⁸ Grigsby, "Moral and Social Meanings of Leprosy," 140.

This witness often accompanied [Claver] in his frequent visits to the hospitals of this city... Claver took no precautions even when he went to the Hospital de San Lázaro outside the city wall, where the contagious odor of this disease is vehement. Before he entered, he was very content and joyful as if he was entering a of delightful garden, visiting and interacting with the sick very closely and with such familiarity that he touched and embraced them as if they were healthy... He confessed them and administered the Holy Sacrament and Last Rites with no scruples, repugnance or horror of such a contagious sickness... When the strong easterly wind bothered the sick, so that they would not be harmed during confession, the father took his cloak, and put half of it over the penitent so that the wind did not hurt them, remaining together under it with the father taking in the stench of the sick (*Proceso*, 232, 243, 244).

González also spoke of how Claver carried those who were so damaged in the hands and feet so that they could not walk, “with no horror or ill will of a disease that most would flee from, and all are worried about even air that comes from where one of these people are.” At the end of his long testimony, González repeated that most people run from the air surrounding lepers, while Claver took them by the hand, led them to their beds, and used his own cape for their shroud (*Proceso*, 246, 248).⁹ Several other witnesses from within the Jesuit order reiterated the same ideas, that Claver had none of the typical repugnance, and dealt with lepers “as if they were clean and healthy.”

The implied dirtiness can be perceived as spiritual, physical, or in the blood of the lepers, due to their illness and even their racial heritage, because similar terms were used to describe Claver’s interactions with dying slaves, especially those that were stuck in barracks or ships in the harbor. Claver’s assistants and those they helped were largely of African descent, in line with the majority of the city’s population. The saint’s mission to the lepers dovetails with his more general reputation as *the slave of the slaves*. Society’s rejects had to be present in order for the saints to have an object for their self-mortifying behavior, done in imitation of Christ. To promote their chosen spiritual hero, the Jesuits needed to emphasize the extreme revulsion most would feel towards the lepers. It should come as no surprise that the testimony attributed to Claver the ultimate act of self-imposed suffering: the kissing and licking of lepers’ sores. The first testimony to bring up this act comes from a leper in residence at the hospital: Alfonso Nicolás, described as

⁹ Claver’s cloak gained a miraculous reputation of its own.

a sixty-year-old poor man. It is then brought up again by a doctor, who mentioned that Claver “licked with his tongue some very large wounds of a black slave woman in San Lázaro” (*Proceso*, 265, 292). Here of course the revulsion a saintly Christian priest might be thought to have towards lepers, women and Africans come together to create the ultimate act of self-sacrifice!

Rare insights into the identities of residents of the leper colony can be gleaned from an eighteenth-century list of healthy inmates, in theory those who would be ejected if recent plans went into effect. All of these inmates were given race labels indicating African heritage, including two men described as *zambos*, seven children described as *zambitos*, *mulatas* or *negritas*, and two wives of lepers, one labeled *negra* and the other *mulata*.

In 1772, more than one hundred lepers continued to live in the hospital just outside the city walls, with more than 600 more in the surrounding area.¹⁰ In 1777, a census made of the leprosaria listed 41 separate houses and 127 residents.¹¹ Twenty-six of these residents were described as healthy, a number that probably includes some of the staff. The overwhelming majority came from Cartagena or the surrounding region, with a handful from other towns in Nueva Granada such as Mompós. Foreigners included four from “Guinea” and one from Galicia. Several children were listed as born in the hospital. Ages ranged from less than one to 88 years old. Unfortunately almost no race labels were given to the lepers because perhaps their status in the colonial race/social hierarchies was pre-determined by their disease.

The *protomedicato* of Cartagena Juan de Arias wrote a thirty-page treatise on leprosy in 1799, and this document engages the twin concepts of skin disease and skin color.¹² He was inspired to provide the Viceroy of Nueva Granada with the latest information on the contagiousness of leprosy because of the “miserable situation in which the poor *lazarinos* find themselves, banished under the pretext of contagion, only adding urgent necessities

¹⁰ Aristizábal, *Iglesias, conventos y hospitales*, 127.

¹¹ *Patron of the hospital real de San Lazaro*, Cartagena, 1777, AGNCol, Colonia, Lazaretos, único, 921-922.

¹² *Informe sobre la pésima asistencia de los leprosos of the hospital*, Cartagena, 1799, AGNCol, Colonia, Lazaretos, único, 652-682.

of daily life to the pain of their disgraceful luck.” Arias began with a short history of leprosy going back to biblical and classical times, moving on to the spread of leprosy into medieval Europe, and describing the various isolating institutions founded in the medieval era. Arias wrote that perhaps the classic authors who described leprosy were too frightened of it to thoroughly explore its contagiousness, while he cited eighteenth-century French and English doctors that believed the disease could only be passed mother to child, either in the womb or during lactation. Due to this theory, and the fact that Arias never observed a local Indian with the disease, he believed it came entirely from Africa, “with the innumerable multitude of blacks that have always been brought here for the cultivation of the countryside and domestic service.” Arias thus represents an early manifestation of the racist vision so common in methods of isolating lepers in 1800s and 1900s Hawaii, India and Australia. Arias believed that Africans passed leprosy on to their children.¹³ To add to the controversy of this theory, Arias claimed to have seen very few Europeans with the disease, and those that have been described as lepers probably instead had venereal disease, often confused with leprosy.¹⁴

The most terrible result of the obsession with leprosy’s contagion, according to Arias, was the unjustified containment of lepers. His evidence comes from both the Old and New Testament – the first he argued never specifically mentioning isolation in its laws, and the second describing lepers roaming the streets. However, he believed that when an individual is consumed by the disease,

disgusting, horrible and reeking, he is an intolerable spectacle for society and has lost the right to communicate with other people, and the magistrates of all civilized nations decree his separation.¹⁵

How does this incredible dismissive condemnation relate to earlier Spanish colonial ideas of race and race separation? Arias also anticipated much of the justifications given in Anglo colonies facing leprosy. But this fate of isolation did not mean this unfortunate must suffer to the degree Arias observed on the Cartagena leper colony now located on

¹³ *Informe sobre la pésima asistencia de los leprosos*, 659.

¹⁴ Here Arias relates a rather unpleasant story of a Spanish syphilitic sailor, believed to have leprosy, see *Informe*, 660-662.

¹⁵ *Informe*, 666.

the island of Caño de Loro, where the “miserable *lazarinos* live in sad straw huts,” generally eating only salted or smoked fish, plantains and corn bread, the worst possible diet for their disease, in Arias’ opinion. Few relatives want to visit, because they had to travel three leagues in a small canoe. All the lepers lived in separate houses, some married, some as “idle, abandoned, desperate libertines, spending their small property in gambling and drink.” The lack of morals, according to Arias, does not come from any innate lasciviousness, by this time a European and Spanish prejudice that connected lustfulness and leprosy,¹⁶ but from the mixing of men and women and their feeling of utter abandonment from society and their families. Much of the colonial perceptions of lepers, both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resembles visions of Africans in the Americas.

Conclusion

I do not have a real conclusion for this work-in-progress summary of possible sources. I have not yet made an extensive survey of the presence of Africans and their descendants in the Inquisition case records for Cartagena. I hope this source will add complexity to my presentation of Afro-Cartagenans and their interaction with Catholic and Spanish institutions. My general work on Cartagena may include chapters on the following topics: honor, reputation and the spread of information; hospitals and the fear of disease; foreigners in Cartagena and how the authorities dealt with them; and how Afro-Cartagenan lives intersected with the Catholic Church, in ways the authorities considered acceptable and unacceptable. The Afro-Cartagenan experience can be included in all of these chapters, although challenges in finding source material may prevent it from taking a central position.

¹⁶ For a short history of leprosy in medieval and early modern Spanish literature, see John R. Burt, *Selected Themes and Icons from Medieval Spanish Literature: Of Beards, Shoes, Cucumbers and Leprosy* (Madrid, 1982) 96-105.