

“SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES”, 1552



KINGDOM OF GUATEMALA (SANTIAGO ATITLÁN, GUATEMALA)



KINGDOM OF HISPANIOLA (LÉOGÂNE, HAITI)

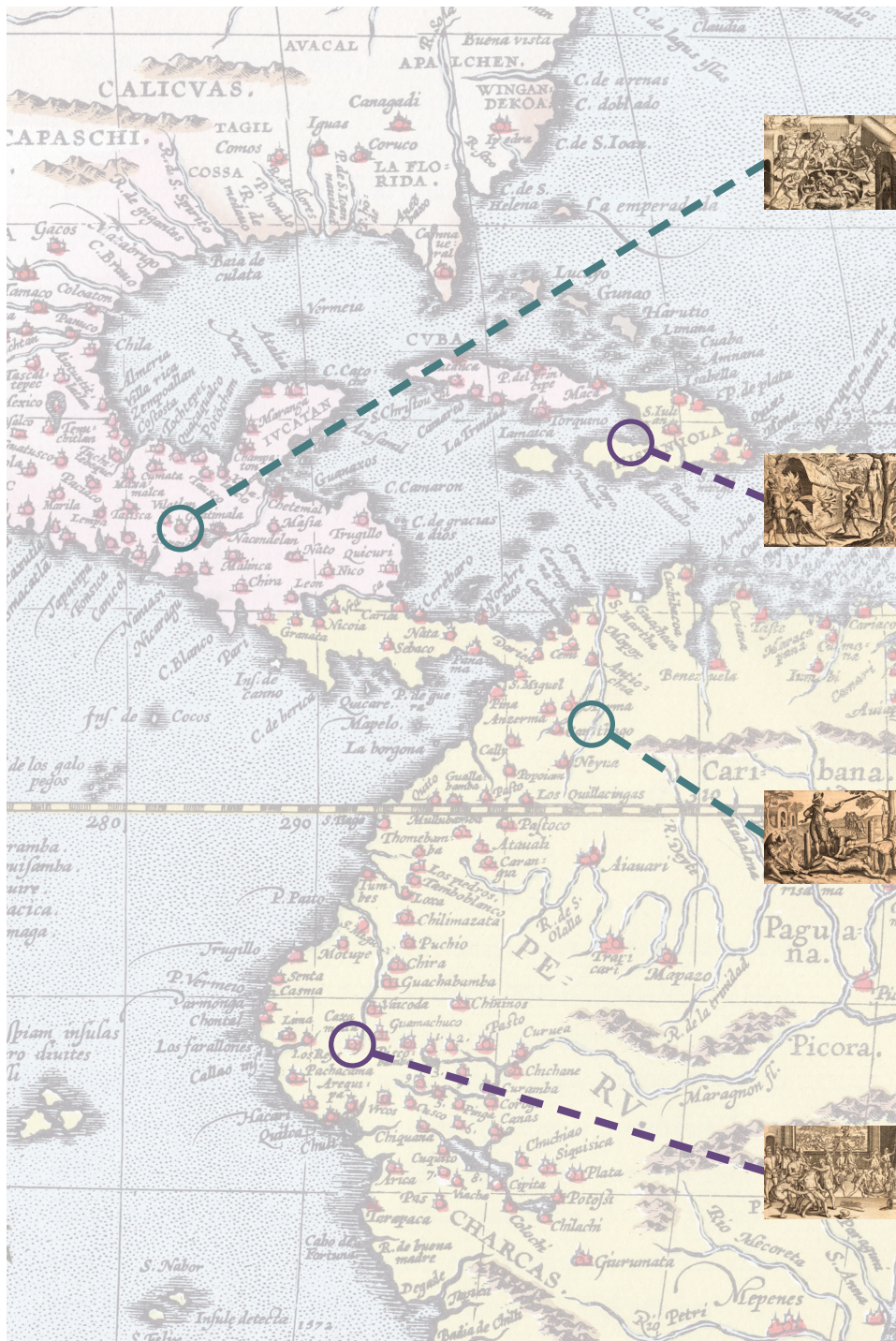


KINGDOM OF GRANADA (BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA)



PROVINCE OF PERU (CAJAMARCA, PERU)

"SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES", 1552



The Indians perceiving that this Barbarous & Hard-hearted [Spanish] People would not be pacified with Humility, large Gifts, or unexampled Patience, but that they were butchered without any Cause; upon serious Consultation [they] took up a Resolution of...fighting for their Lives & Liberty...[and] contrived this Stratagem, to dig Ditches and Holes in the Highway into which the Horses might fall in their passage...[The Spaniards resolved] that as many of the Indians of what Age or Sex whatsoever as were taken, should be cast into these Ditches that they had made.



[With King] Behechio dying, the supreme power of the Kingdom fell to [his sister] Anacaona. But it happened one day, that the [Spanish] Governor...summoned about 300 Dynasta's, or Noblemen, to appear before him, and commanded the most powerful of them, being first crowded into a Thatch Barn or Hovel, to be exposed to the fury of the merciless Fire, and the rest to be pierced with Lances, and run through with the point of the Sword, by a multitude of Men: & Anacaona herself who...swayed the Imperial Scepter, to her greater honor was hanged on a Gibbet.



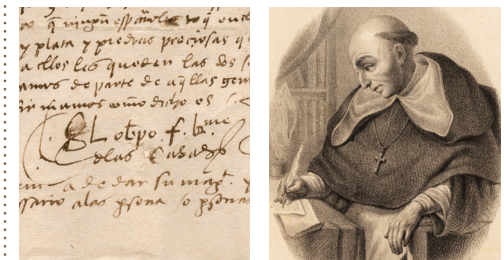
A certain Tyrant, and Chief Commander, took [Bogoca] the King and Lord of the whole Country, and detained him Captive for six or seven months, demanding of him, without any reason, store of Gold & Emeralds...[Bogoca] promised him a House of Gold, hoping, in time, to escape...They raked him, poured boiling Soap into his Bowels, chained his Legs to one post, and fastened his Neck to another, two men holding his Hands, and so applied the scorching heat of the Fire to his Feet; the Tyrant...threatening him with death, if he did not give him the promised Gold.



The Captain...commanded him [King Ataliba] first to be strangled, and afterward thrown into the fire. The King understanding the sentence of Death past upon him, said; Why do you burn me? What Fact have I committed deserving Death? Did you not promise to set me free for a Sum of Gold. And did I not give you a far larger quantity than I promised? But if it is your pleasure so to do, send me to your King of Spain, and thus using many words to the same purpose, tending to the Confusion and Detestation of the Spanish Injustice, he was burnt to Death.



FRAY BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS was a rich *encomendero*-turned-Native rights champion. As an *encomendero* in Hispaniola (1502-1514), he benefitted from the labor of the indigenous, who he was "entrusted" by the Spanish Crown to indoctrinate. Deeply affected by a friar's sermons criticizing the Natives' exploitation, he relinquished his estate and started his activism as a Dominican friar. His writings prompted world powers to try to curb abuses: in 1537, the pope asserted the humanity of Natives, and in 1542, the Spanish Crown passed the "New Laws" that replaced the *encomienda* system. Regrettably, he also promoted the use of African slave labor to meet colonization needs.



THE "SHORT ACCOUNT" (1552) is perhaps Las Casas' most impactful work—it is a rhetorically graphic history on the Spanish invasion of the Americas. The book was published soon after his 1550-51 debates with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and other humanist scholars on the rights and treatment of indigenous people in the Americas; his opposition claimed that they were subhuman due to their "crimes against nature," or human sacrifice practices, and thus worthy of enslavement by the Spanish. Through its flourish, his book suggested the opposite. Protestants and rival sovereignties used it as propaganda against Catholicism & the Spanish Empire, resulting in the publication of over 50 editions in 7 languages. The illustrations and text included here are from the 1598 Latin and 1689 English edition, respectively.

