

Mazambique, Don Luis

(fl. sixteenth century),

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runaway slave leader who later became governor of the free black town of Santiago del Principe, Panama. He was likely born in southeastern Africa (Mozambique). Enslaved in Africa, Portuguese merchants transported him across the Atlantic into Spanish America. Sometime around 1560, Mazambique ran away from his owners in Nombre de Dios and led a runaway slave community near the Caribbean bay of Portobelo.

Mazambique followed in the footsteps of several generations of runaway slaves. For most of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Panama served as the primary transportation route between the Atlantic and the Pacific. African slaves played a crucial role in the port cities of Nombre de Dios and Panama City. As early as the 1550s, sizable *palenques* (runaway slave communities) had grown up in the mountainous center of the isthmus. Between 1553 and 1555, the Audiencia of Panama waged a military campaign in order to recapture a large community headed by an African slave named Bayano. Although Bayano was captured, the presence of African runaways continued to plague the Spanish authorities.

By the 1570s, Mazambique had become the political and military leader of one such community. The arrival of English privateers, including Francis Drake, began to compound the security threat posed by Mazambique and other runaway slaves when it became clear the two groups frequently aided each other. In 1576 the English privateer John Oxham traversed the isthmus with help from Mazambique and his followers. In order to capture the Englishmen, the Audiencia organized a large military expedition. Although the privateers would be captured by July 1577, the Spanish continued the offensive as a war of *sangre y fuego* (blood and fire) against the runaway slaves. Despite a scorched-earth campaign, most runaways avoided capture by fleeing into remote areas. As costs mounted and fears of future slave-English alliances grew, King Philip II authorized a negotiated peace that would grant slaves their freedom should they swear fealty to the king and consent to resettlement in designated locations.

Over the course of 1579, Mazambique and other slave leaders would cautiously take up the offer. Fearful of a Spanish betrayal, on 11 March 1579, Mazambique sent subordinates to determine the truthfulness of the Spanish offer. When he was confident in the genuineness of the offer, on 30 June, Mazambique traveled to Panama City with his wife, Francisca, and over fifty of his subjects to swear fealty to the king and his ministers. In return for his allegiance, Mazambique was named governor for life of a new community to be named Santiago del Principe. Initially, a site was chosen near Panama City; however, inhospitable

conditions led to its relocation to Nombre de Dios. When that Spanish port was abandoned for the more defensible Portobelo in 1597, Santaigo del Principe moved again. Mazambique's community would survive into the seventeenth century as an outlying hamlet of Portobelo.

[See also Bayano .]

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See also

Bayano <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-50818>>