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Entry Nr. 014 Domingos Alvares

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Aaron Spencer Fogleman and Robert Hanserd (eds.), *Five Hundred African Voices: A Catalog of Published Accounts by Africans Enslaved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1586-1936* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2022).

Catalog number: **14**
Name(s) of African providing account: **Domingos Álvares**
Date account recorded: 1743
Date account first published: 2011
Date of entry creation or last update: 2 October 2021

Source: English translation of his life story and responses to the Inquisition at Lisbon printed on p. 164-65 and 172-76 in DOMINGOS ALVARES, AFRICAN HEALING AND THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD by James H. Sweet. Copyright © 2011 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher. www.uncpress.org,

Comments: None

Text of Account:

English translation –

p. 164:

“He said that his name is Domingos Álvares, black slave of José Cardoso de Almeida, born in Nangon on the Mina Coast and resident in Rio de Janeiro. And his parents are already dead and they were called in the language of his land, the father Afnage, and the mother Oconon, both born and raised in Nangon on the Mina Coast. And he does not know who his paternal and maternal grandparents were, nor where they were born or raised. And he is married to Maria da Rocha, who was born in Allada on the Mina Coast and resident in the same city of Rio de Janeiro, from whom he has one little girl who would

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be two years of age. And he is a Christian baptized in the Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição of Engenho Tapirema, parish of Goiana, bishopric of Pernambuco, by the priest of the same church named Gaspar Pereira. Correction: baptized by Father Antonio, whose last name he does not know, resident in the same parish and his godfather was the above-mentioned Gaspar Pereira. And he is confirmed and it was in the Church or Chapel of Engenho Monteiro in the

bishopric of Pernambuco by the bishop of the same, and he does not know his last name. And his godfather was Jerónimo Arre. And in the lands of Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro he went to church and heard mass and preaching and confessed and took communion and performed the other rituals of Christians. And immediately he was ordered to fall to his knees and recite the Christian doctrine: to wit, the Our Father, Hail Mary, Apostles Creed, Hail Holy Queen, the Ten Commandments, and the laws of the Holy Mother Church. And out of everything he knew only the Our Father and the Hail Mary. And he does not know how to read or write. And he has lived in Pernambuco and its outskirts, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and in the above-mentioned his native country [*pátria*], and in all these lands he spoke with all castes of people who presented themselves to him. And he has never been jailed nor presented to the Holy Office until now.”

James Sweet comments:

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“One week later, Varejão tried yet again. Determined to increase the pressure on his African nemesis, the Inquisitor initiated a line of questioning drawn directly from the denunciations made against Domingos in Rio de Janeiro. This was Domingos’ first opportunity to answer his accusers. As such, the interrogation is worth quoting at length. In some instances, Domingos was forthcoming in his responses, but he steadfastly continued to deny any suggestion that his ritual practices were supernatural:”

Text of Account (cont.):

Varejão: Asked if at any time [Domingos] was procured by a certain person to cure an ailment . . . and persuaded her she should go to a certain place where he would cure her with drinks made from fresh herbs picked with the morning dew. And this person, going to the site, found many others in a circle [*roda*] with a pot of water with a knife in it and in the middle a possessed woman he called Captain, who was dancing and jumping, and the accused threw some black powders at her, putting them together with his fingers over her forehead, and then asked her various questions he needed answered in order to make his cures and also to know what happened in distant

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parts. To which the possessed one responded, giving news of what happened on the seas with ships and in other very remote lands. And the possessed one suddenly fell to the ground like a dead person, and the accused went to assist her, giving a smack on the ground next to her head, which immediately caused her to rise and she continued to respond to the questions he was asking.

Domingos: Said with respect to everything asked in the question, nothing is true except to say that when some of the people were suffering from ailments, he rubbed them on the chest and

head with some powders he had in his calabash, which he mentioned in his confession, and with respect to everything else, it is false.

Varejão: Asked if at any time he had asked the following questions to a possessed woman: Captain, are we friends? And she responded to him: We are. And he continued saying the following: Am I in hell? To which she responded: No, because you all are more able than I, and where you all walk, we are not able to walk. And immediately the accused pulled out a little calabash, put his finger over the mouth and hit it with his left hand and then a plume of smoke emerged from the calabash, which he gave to the possessed woman to smell, also putting it on her face and head, which sent her into a fury.

Domingos: Said the only thing true in the question is that he used a small calabash in which he had some powders made from roots and herbs, which he rubbed on the face and head of the people suffering illness; however, this did not result in any reaction, because the people remained calm and in the form they were, and as for the rest of the question, everything is false.

Varejão: Asked if he remembered applying certain remedies made of porridge in which he threw various ingredients which caused the person to feel very bad and suffer such affliction and perturbation that she jumped out of the bed confused, running like a crazy person, without being able to calm her by any means, and that only the accused was able to calm her, and that the accused buried in three parts the bones of dead people and some animals, needles, hairs, peels, and roots.

Domingos: Said that it is true that he gave a purgative of porridge to Leonor de Oliveira, resident of Santa Rita, and the force of her vomit was the remedy, and she jumped out of bed and ran like a crazy person, and after returning to a calm state, she said to him that the perturbation was born of her monthly menstruation, which was

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going on at the time he applied the purgative. And the malicious objects they found buried were made by Jacinta, slave of Leonor de Oliveira, as she had declared to him.

Varejão: Asked if another time he went to cure a certain person who he found totally mistrusting of doctors, and the accused grabbed her wrist, put his hand on her head, and pulled out some powders that he rubbed on her forehead, saying they were to see if she had *feitiços*, which immediately sent the person into a frightened and deformed state.

Domingos: Said that he did not proffer that which was said in the question and to say the contrary is false. And it is only true that he took the pulse of some sick people; however, this was to see whether or not the person had a weak pulse, and not for any other motive.

Varejão: Asked if another time a person arrived at his site and asked what he planned to do there, and the accused said he wanted to close the bodies of these people who were sick, and the person then asked what this was for, and the accused responded that it was best for him not to know.

Domingos: Said that everything in the question is true; however, everything he did was done naturally, including when he put powders in the cuts on the arm and foot. And the reason the powders disappeared was because they became very fine from beating them.

Varejão: Asked if he gave sick people drinks from roots, over which he made a blessing with his right hand, which resulted in the vomiting of hairs and the defecation of bones that appeared to be chicken and hawk talons, making the people feel better from the great pains they suffered earlier. And the accused predicted the success of the remedy before applying it.

Domingos: Said that he never divined anything like that, and it is false that he predicted anything, and it is only true to say that he announced his intentions when he gave the remedies he proffered in order to facilitate the healing of the people who took them.

Varejão: Asked if another time he cured various people from the spirits that plagued them, using various black chickens that he removed from a house he had there, and the chickens were passed over the heads of the sick people along with some black powders, and all of this resulted in the people suddenly falling on the ground like they were dead, and the accused said they had the cult spirit. And immediately leaving for another place nearby, he ordered a

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pot of water with a knife and some calabashes. And then he ordered all of the people to put their fingers in the pot, which caused some of them to convulse and snort like filthy animals, and they ran all over the field until they fell to the ground like dead people. And the accused put his hand on the chest, at the same time saying various words, and breaking one of the calabashes he immediately said that the spirit had gone away. And so the spirit would not return to give *feiticos*, the accused cut the arm and sole of the feet and put black powders in the cuts, saying he was closing the bodies so the spirits would not return to cause trouble.

Domingos: Said that everything in the question is true. That when a sick person arrived at his property convulsing and in great pain, he went to find a black chicken he had there. And with the blood of the chicken he anointed the person on the head and chest, rubbing it all the way down to the legs, and also throwing in some herbal powders, everything for the end of seeing the person return to health, and without any other intention than to understand that the said remedy would be naturally good for the said complaint. And afterward, he ordered the person to wash his head in a bowl of water which he always had prepared for everything that would be necessary. And this is the only thing he has to declare that he did with respect to what is contained in the question, and everything else imputed in the question is false.

Varejão: Asked if another time, beyond that which the accused has already confessed, he was called to cure various people and he ordered everyone to appear before him and he began to call out their names without previously having news or knowledge of them. And shortly thereafter the accused was at a certain place where ordering to dig, there was found a calabash with bones, roots, and many other things inside, which the accused said was what made the people sick. And then, putting a pot of water on a fire, the accused threw in various roots that he removed from a sack, and casting a little of this water on one of the people, the person fell to the ground like a

dead person. And the accused went to his aid, saying he was not dead, and grabbing him, the person arose alive, like nothing had happened.

Domingos: Said that everything in the question is true, which happened in the following form: He was called by one Francisco Rodrigues, resident in São João de Merití, next to Prainha on his roça, in order to cure various *pretos* he had on that farm. And arriving at the

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said place, he ordered to appear before him all the *pretos*, and it is true he called some of them by their names, however, only those he knew by sight and dealings in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where Francisco Rodrigues also has a house. And the accused immediately ordered them to dig in a particular place on the farm, and in it was found a calabash with all the ingredients mentioned in the question that was asked. And the accused discovered that a *preta* of Francisco Rodrigues named Justa was who had made that evil, and she had buried them in that spot together with another *preto* who was already dead. And Justa requested that the accused not discover it so her master would not know the person who made the crime. And it is also true that the *preto* who dug up the calabash immediately fell to the ground like a dead person, and then the accused threw a little water at him and he rose to his feet, and the falling to the ground was the effect of the evil that he discovered. And this is all that happened with respect to the content of the question.”

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