

Ayllón, Lucas Vásquez de ^[1]

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See also: [Exploration, European- Part 1: Introduction](#) ^[2]

ca. 1480–18 Oct. 1526

Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón, explorer, was the son of Judge Juan Ayllón, head of a noble and rich family of Toledo, Spain, which probably originated in the province of Segovia. Ayllón was educated in civil law, probably at the [University of Salamanca](#) ^[3]. His fondness for adventure explains his reluctance to remain in Toledo and enjoy the position and wealth of his family. Consequently, he was sent to [Santo Domingo](#) ^[4] by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros—founder of the [University of Alcalá](#) ^[5] and adviser to [Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand](#) ^[6]—as one of three justices of the supreme court. The party, including three [Hieronymite monks](#) ^[7], arrived in the island in 1516.

For several years, Ayllón had no unusual experiences in his position as judge. However, after the arrival of [Cortés](#) ^[8] in Mexico, the situation changed abruptly. Both Diego Velázquez, the governor, and Rodrigo de Narváez were jealous of the newcomer and the success he seemed to have in New Spain. They decided to send a force to stop him. Some time later, Ayllón was given the difficult assignment of attempting to dissuade them from interfering with Cortés. The authorities did not relish the possibility of the natives of New Spain witnessing what would amount to civil war between two factions of the invading Christians. For his efforts, Ayllón got a very rude reception from both Velázquez and Narváez, and also a short period of imprisonment. Cortés continued to be master of the situation in Mexico.

Ayllón was intrigued by the colorful stories brought to Santo Domingo by [Francisco Gordillo](#) ^[9], who had sailed along the coast of Florida as far as latitude 33°30'. With an enslaver, Gordillo had captured about seventy American Indian people from various tribes. Ayllón ordered the American Indian captives to be released, but he could not forget the stories told of Florida; he finally decided to go to Spain with a request for permission to explore the coast of Chicora. The permission was granted, and at the same time the [Emperor Charles V](#) ^[10] made Ayllón a Knight of the [Order of Santiago](#) ^[11], the highest Spanish military order. The historian Oviedo, who was in Spain at the same time, says that he passed by the famous Hieronymite Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, a mecca for returning voyagers after Columbus's visit there in 1493, where he saw Ayllón, just honored by the emperor.

Ayllón returned to Santo Domingo in June 1526 and immediately made plans to send an expedition to Florida with [Diego?] Miruelo as chief pilot. The expedition, financed by Ayllón, sailed with three ships: *La Bretona*, the flagship; and two smaller vessels, *Santa Catalina* and *Chorruga*; as well as a smaller boat to be used in exploring inland waters. With more than five hundred men, women, and children, enslaved Black people, and several friars of the Order of Preachers, they sailed to latitude 33°40', to an area that had been called Chicora and to a stream called the River Jordan. The whole area was marshy, infested with mosquitoes, and obviously not suitable for the establishment of their new utopia. The expedition sailed about 150 miles to the southwest, perhaps to the [Cape Fear River](#) ^[12]. The American Indian tribes of the area, aware that the newcomers had suffered a setback to the north, attacked almost immediately. And as so often happened to Spain in America, dissension arose among Ayllón's followers. Ayllón and many others became seriously ill of a fever. He died on St. Luke's day. One contemporaneous report says that his body was thrown into the sea. The rest of the party, now numbering fewer than 150, returned with the one remaining ship to Santo Domingo.

Ayllón was a pioneer in introducing sugar into the New World and with one Francisco de Ceballos built a fine sugar mill on the north coast some forty-five leagues from Santo Domingo, an enterprise that was managed by his heirs after his death. Ayllón had at least two children, including a son who in 1562 requested and received permission to establish a colony in Chicora, where his father had failed and died, but who himself died before he could put his plan into operation. Ayllón's daughter, Doña Inés de Villalobos, married Juan de Junco, a captain who had sailed with Sebastian Cabot. Ayllón had at least one brother, Perálvarez, also a member of the Order of Santiago, who fought with Caesar Borgia in Italy and who was both a poet and a dramatist.

After Ayllón's failure to establish a colony in Chicora, the emperor never again turned his eyes to the northern latitudes of North America, leaving that area to the English and the French.

Ayllón was a most unusual man to be interested in establishing a colony in the wilderness. Rich, noble, well educated, he offered a strong contrast to most of the *conquistadores*. He used his own resources to finance the expedition, asking the emperor only for permission. In some measure he resembles Sir [Walter Raleigh](#) ^[13]. There is one big difference: Walter Raleigh never came close to the shores of North Carolina.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit <https://aaahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-Q> ^[14]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> ^[15]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

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Additional Resources:

Biography in the New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02164c.htm> [16]

Enchanted Learning: <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/explorers/page/d/deayllon.shtml> [17]

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Shackleford Horses: <http://shacklefordhorses.org/timeline.htm> [19]

Maritime history and survey of the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers, Wilmington Harbor, North Carolina. Volume 1: Maritime history, North Carolina Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/maritime-history-and-survey-of-the-cape-fear-and-northeast-cape-fear-rivers-wilmington-harbor-north-carolina.-volume-1-maritime-history/2143404> [20]

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