



## *Did You Know?*

By \*Marjorie Charlot

Black presence in the military and in wars can be traced to various periods of the ancient world and across cultures.

**Jugurtha** was a North African patriot who initiated the Jugurthine War (112–105 B.C.). His guerrilla warfare would inflict embarrassing defeat upon the Roman legions. Authors Brunson and Rashidi quote Graham Webster when he wrote, “The wars of Jugurtha demonstrated the value of the nimble Moorish horsemen who Trajan later found so useful against the Dacians.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Black Conquistadors*

**Juan Bardales** was a free black slave who participated in the conquests of Honduras and Panama. For the part he played in the conquest of Honduras, he received an award consisting of an annual subsidy of 50 pesos.<sup>2</sup>

**Nuflo de Olano** was a slave conquistador and explorer. He was part of the Vasco Núñez de Balboa expedition, along with 30 other Africans, 190 Spaniards, and 1,000 Native Americans when they went through the jungle to cross the Isthmus of Panama. De Olano in 1513 was with Balboa when they first saw the Pacific Ocean.<sup>3</sup>

**Antonio Pérez** was a free North African who was a cavalryman and one of Diego de Losada’s most valued captains in 1568. Pérez took part in the conquest of Venezuela.<sup>4</sup> He was described as “an old soldier of African wars who had been with the emperor at the storming of Tunis.”<sup>5</sup>

**Juan Portugués** was either black African or black Portuguese. He was involved in the conquest of Venezuela.<sup>6</sup>

**Miguel Ruíz** was a free Spanish mulatto who was a conquistador in Peru and one of two blacks in Francisco Pizarro’s company at Cajamarca. He had joined the expedition voluntarily. He was a horseman.<sup>7</sup> At the capture of the Inca in Cajamarca, of the 168 conquistadors present there where two blacks—Ruíz and Juan García. Both would receive their share of gold and silver.<sup>8</sup>

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## *Japan (Samurais)*

**"For a Samurai to be brave, he must have a bit of Black blood."**

—Japanese Proverb<sup>†</sup>

**Sakanouye no Tamuramaro (Sakanoue no Tamuramaro) (758–811)** was Japan's first shogun, and according to some, an African. In their essay entitled "Black Shogun: The African Presence in Japanese Antiquity," James E Brunson, Runoko Rashidi, and Wallace Magsby Jr. state that the first scholar to take note of Tamuramaro may have been anthropologist Alexander Francis Chamberlain<sup>‡</sup> (1865–1914), who was born in Kenneinghall, Norfolk, England, but raised in America and Canada. They also write "stated in an exceptionally frank and matter of fact manner" the following:<sup>9</sup>

And we can cross the whole of Asia and find the Negro again, for, when in far-off Japan, the ancestors of the modern Japanese were making their way northward against the Ainu, the aborigines of that country, the leader of their armies was Sakanouye Tamuramaro, a famous general and a Negro.<sup>10</sup>

Sakanouye was a warrior who is symbolized in Japanese history as a "paragon of military virtues,"<sup>11</sup> He was regarded as an outstanding military commander of the early Heian royal court (The Heian Period, 794–1185 C.E.). It was during this period that the term *samurai* was first used. It comes from "the verb *samurau*, or better *saburau*, which signifies: to be on one's guard, to guard; it applied especially to the soldiers who were on guard at the Imperial palace."<sup>12</sup> He served as a palace guard and proved "himself by his strategical talent and personal prowess."<sup>13</sup> Tamuramaro became one of the great warriors in Japanese history due to his heroic struggle and victory over the Ainus<sup>§</sup> (Ainos).<sup>14</sup>

**Legend of Yasuke**—according to Cpl. Kenneth K. Trotter Jr. in his article "The Legend of Yasuke," in *The Iwakuni Approach*, the name "Yasuke, means, "the black one," in Japanese." However on the website Diasporicroots.com, the following explanation is given for Yasuke's name: "We do not know this Yasuke's original Makua name but the Japanese called him Yasuke (彌介), the reason for this name is unknown as it does not have a clear meaning and that it is most likely a "Japanization" of his actual name."

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, this African was a page to Japan's most powerful warlord, Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582). He also served as Nobunaga's bodyguard and was granted the prestigious rank of samurai.<sup>15</sup> One must wonder how this African from central or western Africa

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<sup>†</sup> Quote is from <http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/shogun.html> (Retrieved on August 20, 2008)

<sup>‡</sup> Chamberlain graduated from the University of Toronto in 1868 with honors in languages and ethnology. He would later receive a Ph.D. from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, the first such degree given for work in anthropology at an American University. He would become an assistant professor of anthropology at Clark, and the department editor for the *American Anthropologist* and the *American Journal of Anthropology*. An essay by James E Brunson, Runoko Rashidi, and Wallace Magsby Jr. entitled "Black Shogun: The African Presence in Japanese Antiquity," page 316.

<sup>§</sup> In the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, these people are called "Ezo." See: Atsuru, Yagi: "Sakanoue no Tamuramaro," *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* Vol. 6, 379.

ended up in Japan. Yasuke arrived in Japan in 1579, the servant (page) of the Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano, who had been appointed the visitor (inspector) of the Jesuit missions in the Indies (southern and eastern Asia). He must have been a very trustworthy servant to reach such an extremely high position.<sup>16</sup> Upon his arrival to the capital area in March 1581, he was a sensation. At one event, several people were crushed to death while clamoring to get a look at him.<sup>17</sup> Reports state that Yasuke's skin was as dark as an ox, which was surprising to the Japanese. He towered over those around him, even the Italians, as he was rumored to stand between 6'3" and 6'5". Yasuke may have been about 24 or 25 and Japanese sources described him as "healthy and good looking, and possessing the strength of 10 men."<sup>18</sup> Hearing of this black foreigner, Japanese warlord Oda Nobunaga requested Yasuke's presence at his castle. Nobunaga did not believe Yasuke's skin color was real and the warlord forced Yasuke to strip and had him scrubbed vigorously.<sup>19</sup> Yasuke, who was affluent in several languages, spoke Japanese, although not to will. Nobunaga asked that Yasuke be placed in his care when Valignano prepared to leave.<sup>20</sup> Descriptions of Yasuke, the black page ("kuro-bōzu"), and his meeting with Nobunaga on March 23, 1581 can be found in the *Lord Nobunaga Chronicle* (Shinchōkōki).<sup>21</sup> This compiled chronicle consists of 16 volumes and is considered "mostly factual" and "reliable."<sup>22</sup>

Yasuke became a permanent fixture in Nobunaga's retinue, his size and strength acting as a deterrent to assassination, not to mention adding a flavor of exoticism.<sup>23</sup> Nobunaga was so fond of Yasuke that he "was given the honor of being made a member of the samurai class, a rare honor among foreigners."<sup>24</sup> Yasuke was allowed to wear samurai armor and weapons during several instances in battle. "This is truly impressive as traditionally only those born into samurai families could become samurai, let alone wield their weapons and wear their uniforms, regardless if they were warriors elsewhere. Though he was now considered a free man by most standards, he did not own any land of his own. He was essentially a samurai in name only." This is according to Cpl. Trotter Jr.

In 1582, Nobunaga was betrayed by one of his closest generals, Akechi Mitsuhide. Yasuke was part of Nobunaga's small retinue when they were attacked in Honno-Ji temple in Kyoto by Akechi's army. During this attack, Oda Nobunaga committed ritual suicide; however Yasuke fought his way out of the burning temple and fled to the nearby Azuchi castle with Nobunaga's eldest son, Oda Nobutada. Akechi attacked the castle, and Oda Nobutada, seeing his defeat, instead killed himself in the samurai tradition. Yasuke had also taken part in this second battle and handed his sword over to Akechi's men in the western tradition. Not knowing what to do, Akechi's men looked to their leader who replied that Yasuke was merely a beast and not a true samurai and, therefore, could not be expected to know the honor of seppuku (ritual suicide). Akechi allowed Yasuke to be taken back to Kyoto and handed back to the Jesuits who were relieved to see him still alive.<sup>25</sup> After returning to Kyoto, Yasuke disappeared into history.<sup>26</sup>

**Shishak and Tirhaquah (Taharka)**—two negro conquerors, both of them reportedly conquered Assyria and Babylonia; their names are mentioned in the Bible.<sup>27</sup>

**Tarik ibn Zeyad**—Spain was conquered on April 30, 711 A.D., by this African general and his fellow Moors who crossed the Mons Calpe near Xeres. After taking control, Tariq had a fortress built at the site. This fort was named after him by his men who, out of admiration and respect, named it "Gabel Tariq," or "General Tariq." This would be corrupted to Gibraltar and its fortress

known as the “Rock of Gibraltar.” Tariq’s army of 7,000 troops consisted of 6,700 native (Moorish) Africans and 300 Arabs.<sup>28</sup>

After building the fort, Tariq went on to conquer Algeciras and Carteya. By the time he caught up to Roderick, the last Visigothic King of Spain, and his army on July 711, Tariq’s own army had grown and was now made up of Africans, Arabs, and Spanish natives who wanted to fight their enemy, the Visigoths. Roderick’s army numbered 60,000 troops compared to Tariq’s 14,000. His address to his men during this week-long attack was:<sup>29</sup>

My men, whither can you flee? Behind you lies the sea and before you the foe. You possess only your courage and constancy for you are present in this country poorer than orphans before a greedy guardian’s table. It will be easy to turn this table on him if you will but risk death for one instance.<sup>30</sup>

General Tariq went on to conquer several other cities including Toledo, which was handed over to him by the Jews who supplied him with more arms and horses. Governor Musa also aided him in 712. Musa had gathered 18,000 soldiers made up of primarily Berbers (Africans) to take over other cities. After a last attempt to take back control in 713, Roderick died. His death marked the end of the Visigoths’s rule in Spain, which began in 414. Roderick’s body was entombed at Vizen, which is modern-day Portugal. The Moors went on to take control of Archidona, Cordova, Ecija, Elvira, and Murcian Oribeula.<sup>31</sup> They called their newly conquered territory al-Andalus, which means in Arabic “the Isle of vandals.” It would be corrupted to what is known today as Andalusia.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Greece***

**Clitus Niger (c. 300 B.C.)** was King of Bactria and Cavalry leader of Alexander the Great. “Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, and Curtius, writers of antiquity, speak of him as Clitus Niger—Niger being Latin for ‘Negro.’”<sup>33</sup> He was the son of Droides and Lanice. Clitus was the foster brother of Alexander the Great and his mother was also Alexander’s nurse. Alexander made him commander of his cavalry. Clitus was also a general under Philip of Macedon. He was one of several Africans in the Greek armies. Clitus, during the battle of Arbela, saved Alexander’s life. Plutarch’s *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans Volume II* describes how Clitus Niger saved the life of Alexander the Great from Persian commander Spithridates.

But [as] he was about to repeat his stroke, Clitus, called the Black Clitus, prevented him, by running him through the body with his spear.<sup>34</sup>

In another text by Plutarch in *The Age of Alexander Nine Greek Lives*, Clitus’s name is spelled differently.

But just as Spithridates raised his arm for another blow, ‘Black Cleitus,’ as he was called, struck first and ran him through with a spear, and at the same moment Rhoesaces was cut down by Alexander’s sword.<sup>35</sup>

This sentence is footnoted and at the bottom of the page the following was written:

Commander of the Royal Squadron of Companion Cavalry: called 'Black' to distinguish him from Cleitus the White, an infantry commander.

While in Asia, Clitus argued with Alexander about the Asiatic campaign. In a fit of rage during the argument, Alexander pierced Clitus's heart with a javelin.<sup>36</sup>

**Leon the African** invaded southern Greece in 904 A.D. with 54 ships and 10,800 negroes, and ruled it for years.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Rome***

Because they proved themselves to be skilled fighters, the Moors were actively recruited by Rome and would serve tours of duty in Britain, France, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, etc.<sup>38</sup> The following quote is an example:

An original brass military diploma which dates from the middle of the second century A.D. mentions Moorish soldiers were in Moesia, which is modern Serbia. Another military diploma of A.D. 158 speaks of Moorish soldiers from Africa in Dacia, or modern Romania, and also of auxiliary troops of the Dacia Moors. A Roman, document "*Notitia Dignitatum* which dates to the beginning of the fifth century A.D. mentions several Moorish battalions in the Balkans and the Moorish military colony *Ad Mauros* which was located on the Inn River near Vienna; and in what is modern Besarabia, there was a city called Maurocastrum. According to *Notitia Dignitatum*, 2500 to 5000 Illyrian Moorish soldiers, in five separate military units, had served in the Near East. From this document we must deduce that at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century at least 100,000 descendants of Moors lived in Illyricum, which was located in the present-day Balkans."<sup>39</sup>

In regard to armies of the Roman Empire, there were the roles that blacks played in the armies of the Roman Empire. The following are examples:

**Moorish Chieftain Bogud** was used by Julius Caesar several times during his various campaigns. Bogud was the commander of the excellent Moorish light cavalry. These soldiers would prove their worth in 435 B.C. at Munda when Bogud led the charges that swept Gnaeus Pompey's horse from the field.<sup>40</sup>

**St. Maurice** was a Moor who served in the Roman Legion and who would become a martyr along with his troop.

**Lucius Quietus** was an Ethiopian prince from either Cern or, perhaps, Mogador Island, off the Atlantic coast of Morocco.<sup>41</sup> He was a skilled soldier who was an expert at using the double-edged Roman sword, the lance, and the shield.<sup>42</sup> Quietus was the commander of the Moorish cavalry in the Roman army from the time of Domitian. But it was under Emperor Trajan that he would distinguish himself. Quietus was one of Trajan's principle commanders in the Parthian campaign.<sup>43</sup> Dio states in his text *Roman History* that

Lusius Quietus was a Moor and likewise ranked as a leader of the Moors and as commander of a troop in the cavalry; but, having been condemned for base conduct, he had been dismissed from the service at the time and disgraced. Later, however, when the Dacian war came on and Trajan needed the assistance of the Moors, he came to him of his own accord and displayed great deeds of prowess. Being honoured for this, he performed far greater and more numerous exploits in the second war, and finally advanced so far in bravery and good fortune during this present war that he enrolled among the ex-praetors, became consul, and then governor of Palestine.<sup>44</sup>

It was he, Quietus, who the Emperor Trajan sent to suppress a Jewish revolt, which he did with great severity. For this he was named Governor General of Judea in 117 C.E. with unlimited power. The Emperor Trajan named Quietus his successor to the imperial purple.<sup>45</sup> There are no details of the revolt of the Jews in Judea against Rome, but reference to it can be found in the talmudical accounts of the “the war of Quietus.” He was removed from his command of the Moors and the army by Emperor Hadrian and was later executed for taking part in a conspiracy against the emperor.<sup>46</sup> However, Dio writes that “those who were slain at the beginning were Palma and Celsus, Nigrinus and Lusius, the first two for the alleged reason that had conspired against him during a hunt, and the others on certain other complaints, but in reality because they had great influence and enjoyed wealth and fame.”<sup>47</sup> It is most likely that Lucius Quietus was murdered by Hadrian, who wanted to eliminate Quietus as a rival. An inscription found in Palestine (“C.I.G.” No. 4616) seems originally to have contained the name Quietus, which was perhaps later erased at the command of Hadrian.<sup>48</sup> On the column of Trajan there’s a depiction of Lucius Quietus’s Moors. They are shown wearing nothing but short tunics; their weapons consist of a spear and a small round buckler (*cetra*), and they ride their horses without saddle or bridle, guiding them simply by a halter round the neck.<sup>49</sup>

**Julius Saturninus (d.c. 278 A.D.)** was one of the reliable generals in the army of Aurelian. He was in command of the East. Shortly after Probus succeeded Aurelian, the Legions of Saturninus elevated him to the purple. His period, however, was brief and although he had minted coins at Antioch, his own soldiers killed him at Apamea. He was most likely a Moor, as it was reported by Zosimus in the *Historia Augusta*. This is according to author Matthew Bunson in his text *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*.<sup>50</sup>

**M. Aemilius Aemilianus** was a Moor born in Mauretania who served in Rome’s army. He would defeat the Goths in A.D. 253 and was proclaimed emperor of Rome by his troops.<sup>51</sup> Three months later he was killed by his troop.

**Zenophilus**, Consul of Numidia, was apparently very proud to be the descendant of a Moor, for he boasted that “my grandfather is a soldier, he had served in the Commitatus, for our family is of Moorish origin. To the Commitatus belonged the renowned *Equites Mauri*, a Black horse cavalry of North Africa.”<sup>52</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Brunson, James E. and Rashidi, Runoko. “The Moors in Antiquity,” in *Golden Age of the Moors*, Ivan Van Sertima, ed., New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> Herrera, Robinson A.: 'Por que no sabemos firmar': Black Slaves in Early Guatemala *The Americas* 57.2 (2000), 251.

<sup>3</sup> Sanders, Nancy I. *A Kid's Guide to African American History: More than 70 Activities*. 2nd ed. Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Review Press, 2007, p.17.

<sup>4</sup> Restall, Matthew. “Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America,” *The Americas*, Vol. 57, No. 2, The African Experience in Early Spanish America (Oct., 2000), 174 and 188.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>9</sup> Brunson, James, Rashidi, Runoko, and Magsby, Jr, Wallace” “Black Shogun: The African Presence in Japanese Antiquity,” in *African Presence in Early Asia*, co-edited by Ivan Van Sertima, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers), 317-318.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>13</sup> Fleming, Beatrice J. and Pryde, Marion J. *Distinguished Negroes Abroad*. Washington DC: The Associated Publishers, 1946, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> Osei, G.K.. *African Contribution to Civilization*. London: The African Publication Society, 1973, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> “Yasuke African Samurai of the Japanese Warlord Nobunaga Oda.” *Diasporicroots – African, Black & Diasporic History*, Accessed October 13, 2014.  
<http://diasporicroots.tumblr.com/post/69583405733/yasuke-african-samurai-of-the-japanese-warlord>

<sup>16</sup> Diasporicroots, “Yasuke African Samurai of the Japanese Warlord Nobunaga Oda.”

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<http://www.mcasiwakuni.marines.mil/Portals/112/Docs/newssection/approach/2013/Iwakuni130222.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Diasporicroots, "Yasuke African Samurai of the Japanese Warlord Nobunaga Oda."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Cpl. Kenneth K. Trotter Jr. "The Legend of Yasuke."

<sup>20</sup> Diasporicroots, "Yasuke African Samurai of the Japanese Warlord Nobunaga Oda."

- Paris, Sandy. "Yasuke the African Samurai," from *That's What's Good Media UK*, July 16, 2014, Accessed October 13, 2014  
<http://www.thatswhatgoodmedia.com/yasuke-african-samurai/>

<sup>21</sup> Paris

<sup>22</sup> *Yasuke the Real Afro-Samurai* a Documentary Film by Floyd Webb and Deborah DeSnoo Coming in 2016, Accessed October 13, 2014 <http://yasuke-san.com/>

- Paris

<sup>23</sup> "Yasuke: The African Samurai," *The Daily Beagle*, March 7, 2013. Accessed October 13, 2014 <http://thedailybeagle.net/2013/03/07/yasuke-the-african-samurai/>

- Diasporicroots

- Paris.

<sup>24</sup> Diasporicroots

<sup>25</sup> "Yasuke: The African Samurai," *The Daily Beagle*

<sup>26</sup> Cpl. Kenneth K. Trotter Jr. "The Legend of Yasuke,"

<sup>27</sup> Rogers, J.A. *100 Amazing Facts about the Negro with Complete Proof. A Short Cut To The World History Of The Negro*. United States, 1995, p.28.

<sup>28</sup> Chandler, 161-162.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 161-162.



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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 161-162.

<sup>32</sup> Grabowski, John E. *Spain*. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 2000, p.20.

<sup>33</sup> Rogers, J.A. *World's Great Men of Color Volume I*. New York: Touchstone, 1974.

<sup>34</sup> Plutarch. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans Volume II, The Dryden Translation, edited and revised by Arthur Hugh Clough*. New York: The Modern Library, 1992, p. 151.

<sup>35</sup> Plutarch. *The Age of Alexander Nine Greek Lives, Translated and Annotated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, Introduction by G.T. Griffith*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 269.

<sup>36</sup> Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color, Vol. I*, 94-97.

<sup>37</sup> Rogers, J.A. *Nature Knows No Color-Lines*. New York: H.M. Rogers, 1980, p.111.

<sup>38</sup> Brunson and Rashidi, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>40</sup> Bunson, Matthew. *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.283.

<sup>41</sup> Snowden, Frank M. *Before Color Prejudices the Ancient View of Blacks*. London, England: Howard University Press, 1983, p.33.

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<sup>42</sup> Hyman, Mark. *A Book with Two Tiles Black Shogun of Japan and Sophonisha: Wife of Two Kings Other Events from Ancient Times*, Philadelphia: MHA Associates, Inc., 1989, p.93-94.

<sup>43</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Lusius Quietus. Volume 13 P-Rec, Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971, p.1427.

<sup>44</sup> Cassius Dio Cocceianus. *Dio's Roman History with an English Translation by Earnest Cary, Ph.D. Volume IX Book*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954-1961, p.395-397.

<sup>45</sup> Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color Volume II*, 546

- *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1427

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- Cassius Dio Cocceianus, 423.

<sup>46</sup> Encyclopedia Judaica, 1427.

<sup>47</sup> Cassius Dio Cocceianus, 427.

<sup>48</sup> Singer and Krauss, 287.

<sup>49</sup> Cheesman, G.L. *The Auxilia of the Roman Imperial Army*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1914, p.128-129.

<sup>50</sup> Bunson, 377.

<sup>51</sup> Brunson and Rashidi, 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 and 49.