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DE SOTO'S FIRST HEADQUARTERS IN FLORIDA

by JOHN R. SWANTON

Knowing that Hernando de Soto, his expedition, and the places he visited will probably be matters of discussion for years and years, I have not recently ventured any further contributions regarding them. However, challenge of one of my conclusions, the probable site of the Indian town of Ucita where De Soto established his first North American headquarters, has recently been made in a scientifically motivated paper ("The Terra Ceia Site, Manatee County, Florida." No. 3 of the *Publications of the Florida Anthropological Society*, by Ripley P. Bullen), and this calls for some comments.

Barring the discovery of some object definitely identifiable with the De Soto expedition, no one can know with absolute finality whether Ucita was or was not located on Terra Ceia. I do not wish this statement - indicative of the detachment with which one should approach a fact of history - to be interpreted as any weakening of my previously expressed opinion that documentary and circumstantial evidence point to that site as far and away the most probable one.

While discussions of De Soto's expedition are always in order, I feel that the locations of the Governor's landing place and of his first headquarters at Ucita are limited to the south shore of Tampa Bay by evidence that cannot be denied with any plausibility. This evidence is as follows:

(1) In the "Description Universal de las Indias," of Lopez de Velasco, written within less than forty years of De Soto's time, the present Tampa Bay is clearly described although with some minor inaccuracies and it is called "The Bay of *Tocobaga*,

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**NOTE** - In this *Quarterly* (xvi,3,Jan.1938) Dr. John R. Swanton told us of his investigations and conclusions on the *Landing Place of De Soto in Florida in 1539*. Later, in the *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission* (Washington, 1939, 400 p.) of which he was Chairman, his conclusions were similar. The *Quarterly* has asked him to add anything which might have changed any of those views during the long interval. Though there has been little if any change, Dr. Swanton has given us these notes, as a continuation of his paper, on the probable site of De Soto's first headquarters after the landing.

otherwise known as that of the *Holy Spirit* or of *Miruelo*." The latitude given,  $29\ 1/2^{\circ}$ , is, indeed, too far to the north, but of course very much too far for any point south of Tampa. Another important point is that the town of Tocobaga is placed at the head of an arm of the bay running "straight north," that is at the head of Old Tampa Bay. This placement of the Tocobaga town was undoubtedly due to the expedition of Menendez which had taken place a few years before the "Descripcion Universal" was written. But while in the above quotation the Bay of Tocobaga is identified with that of the Holy Spirit, in a short paragraph which immediately precedes, the Bay of the Holy Spirit is said to be half a degree lower than that of Tocobaga which lay to the west of it. Evidently the two arms of Tampa Bay are here being differentiated, the Bay of the Holy Spirit proper being that to the east and south. And finally Lopez de Velasco says that what is now Hillsboro Bay had not been explored. Since the Bay of Tocobaga proper was, then, Old Tampa Bay and Hillsboro Bay had not been entered by Spanish vessels, that part of Tampa Bay with which we are concerned, where De Soto landed and established his headquarters, would be on the south side between the opening of Hillsboro Bay and the Gulf.

(2) In 1612 the Governor of Florida sent an ensign named Juan de Cartaya with a pilot and twenty men to the west coast of the peninsula to induce the chiefs of two unmissionized provinces, Pooy or Pohoy and Calusa, to cease their attacks upon Christian Indians. The party probably reached the Gulf coast at the mouth of the Suwannee River and went on south in dugout canoes. First they came to the Province of Pooy, later to Tampa, the name then given to Charlotte Harbor, and finally to the town of the Calusa chief. Pooy was plainly in or close to the present Tampa Bay, for Cartaya says it was near the Province of Tocobaga. In this Bay of Pooy the Indians told Cartaya "Governor Hernando de Soto disembarked." Old Tampa

Bay being in the Province of Tocobaga and the next point on the south being Charlotte Harbor it is natural to suppose that this Province of Pooy was on the southern side of Tampa Bay or very close to it. The information was supplied by the Indians seventy-three years after De Soto's landing took place and, though the generation that met him would probably have passed away, the event would have been far too striking to have gone completely out of the minds of their children.

(3) In 1675 Gabriel Diaz Vara Calderon, Bishop of Cuba, visited Florida which was then under his jurisdiction and wrote a letter embodying his experiences and a description of the province. In his account of points on the west coast, passing from south to north, he places the "Pojoy River" twelve leagues south of that of "Tocopacas" (Tocobaga) and immediately afterwards, in enumerating the tribes, he indicates a similar position of the "Pojoyes" with reference to the Tocobaga Indians, merely inserting another called "Pineros" between. The "Pojoy River" may well have been the Manatee.

These three authorities indicate, and limit, the area in which we must look for the sites in question so clearly that I do not see how it can be doubted by anyone who places facts above theory.

### ***Location of Ucita***

Admittedly a somewhat greater measure of uncertainty attaches to the determination of the landing place and of Ucita within the limits indicated, but we must again refer to the facts and these are as follows:

The town of Ucita was:

- (1) In plain view as soon as De Soto's vessels entered the bay;
- (2) An extensive shoal lay in front of it;
- (3) It was two leagues (roughly 5.2 miles) from a convenient landing place where the greater part of the army was in fact landed;

- (4) In order to reach Ucita by land, however, the army required two days and this was made necessary because they had to march around "great creeks that run up from the bay." Two days would mean that the distance covered was from 8 to 12 leagues or 21 to 31 miles (Ranjel mentions 12 leagues and is the only one who mentions any distance).
- (5) When an advance party of cavalry under De Soto came in sight of Ucita they found a body of water in between which Ranjel calls "the roadstead of the harbor." However, we know that all got to Ucita next day whether by finding a fording place or in boats. They set out from the landing place either on May 31 or June 1 and were in Ucita on June 3.

These are the requirements for locating Ucita, and I find no site which satisfies the conditions in the region indicated except Terra Ceia. If there has been an error on my part it has not been due to a failure to weigh all the facts in the case. This location is in sight from the entrance of Tampa Bay; there is a wide shoal in front of it; it is the distance indicated to Shaw's Point where, I hold, the greater part of the army was landed; the lower course of the Manatee would account for the detour the army found necessary in spite of the air-line proximity of Terra Ceia; Terra Ceia Bay, an extension of the bay in which De Soto's vessels were anchored, would be the body of water which De Soto and his party found to lie between themselves and the Indian town; and still Terra Ceia could be reached overland. Does it not fit rather well?

The only point demanding further consideration is the negative argument drawn from a failure to find objects on Terra Ceia that may be associated definitely with the great explorer. A number of objects have in fact been recovered in this neighborhood which might date back to De Soto's occupancy of the

place, but I will waive that point. However, one cannot ordinarily establish a positive from mere negative evidence, particularly when that evidence is not complete.

Where has an object been found anywhere that may be identified with the De Soto expedition? It is true that De Soto occupied the site of Ucita from June 2, 1539 to July 15, and that when he marched away he left a captain there with a small body of men who were not withdrawn until late in November, but we know that some material was carried along by the Governor, and some by the captain, and also that Juan de Anasco went from Ucita to De Soto's new headquarters in the Apalachee country by sea with the pinnaces in which much more material might have been carried forward. We know that a great deal was given to the Indians, particularly to the friendly chief Mococo, and it is certain that the site would have been gone over by the Indians after it was abandoned in search of everything they could use, particularly everything of metal.

Again, De Soto with his main army was near the site of Tallahassee from October 6, 1539, to March 4, 1540, five months, but I am not aware that any object has turned up there which can be connected beyond question with this exploration. A few articles are said to have been found attributed to the sixteenth century but in 1565, or even before, contact between the French and Spanish settlers and the Apalachee began.

On October 18, 1540, the Spaniards came to the town of Mabila and a terrible battle took place in which a great deal of European equipment was lost, after which the army remained on the spot until November 14 to recuperate. We know beyond reasonable doubt that this battle occurred somewhere in the present Clarke County, Alabama, and that county has been gone over, almost "with a fine-tooth comb," with the hope of finding some relic of the battle, but so far in vain. From December 16, 1540 to April 26, 1541, De Soto was in a Chick-

asaw town and in the spring he engaged in another fierce battle in which almost everything the army had left from their original equipment seems to have been destroyed or scattered, but nothing has been found there that can be dated back to De Soto, though a Spanish plate of much later date was recovered from one of the mounds. Another winter was passed in the southern part of Arkansas and still another in Louisiana but yet we have no relics of the expedition. At various points in the South halberds have turned up but none of these belongs to a type antecedent to the eighteenth century. Therefore, the mere absence of any objects at Terra Ceia identifiable with the De Soto expedition signifies nothing until objects that can be checked turn up at some other spot. After all, over four hundred years have passed since De Soto landed in Florida and nature can do a lot of destroying in that period.

The locations of De Soto's landing place and the Indian town in which he established his first North American headquarters are placed by early chroniclers beyond reasonable doubt on the south side of Tampa Bay between the entrance to Hillsboro Bay and the Gulf. The specific location demands that certain conditions be fulfilled and I find them fulfilled in a very perfect manner in Shaw's Point and Terra Ceia. If I do not make absolute claims it is because of my respect for scientific detachment, not from lack of conviction.