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OBSERVATIONS ON THE ORIGIN AND DATE OF A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FLORIDA MAP

by RON L. SECKINGER

IN WOODBURY LOWERY'S *The Spanish Settlements within the Present Limits of the United States. Florida, 1562-1574* (1905 edition), there is a map with an inscription which reads, "Map of the coast of Florida, in which region is the Laguna Maymi and where the fort is to be made."¹ A cloverleaf drawn on the map indicates the site of a projected fort at the Bocas de Miguel Mora, an unidentified location on the southeastern coast of the peninsula. The map, as well as contemporary Spanish documents, indicates that the place called the Bocas was along the southeast coast of Florida, probably near Biscayne Bay.

Lowery tentatively dates this map 1595-1600 on the basis of a certain Juan de Posada, who arrived in Florida in 1586, and who wrote an undated letter to the king of Spain in which he recommended the construction of a new defense post at the Cabeza de Martires (still another site identified with the Biscayne Bay area). Juan Maldonado, nephew of the governor of Cuba, made a reconnaissance of the Florida coast in 1595. In his *derrotero* (nautical description), Maldonado mentioned Jega (often called Jeaga or Gega) and the Bocas de Miguel Mora. This document, according to Lowery, is the first in which these names appear. Lowery concludes:

In view of the fact that Posada was probably in Florida at the time of Maldonado's return from his expedition; that the location given the fort on the map corresponds with the description in the "Derrotero"; that these particular legends are identical in both map and "Derrotero," and that the script used on the map and in the endorsed title is of the period in which his letter was written, it is not at all improbable that the map formed part of Posada's letter.²

1. Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements within the Present Limits of the United States. Florida, 1562-1574* (New York, 1905). The map faces page 386.
2. *Ibid.*, 465-66. The entire section dealing with this map appears also in Woodbury Lowery, *A Descriptive List of Maps of the Spanish Possessions within the Present Limits of the United States, 1502-1820* (Washington, 1912), 100-01.

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Lowery's evidence is tenuous at best and assumes a connection between two apparently unrelated documents. In the first place, Posada did not mention a map or the Bocas de Miguel Mora in his letter, and Maldonado's *derrotero* apparently made no reference to a fort on the lower east coast. Secondly, Lowery's "fact" that Posada was "probably" still in Florida in 1595 is merely supposition on his part. Evidence indicates that the map was actually prepared in 1604, in connection with explorations in the interior of the peninsula. A royal *cedula* of September 23, 1603, ordered Governor Pedro de Ibarra to pursue the exploration of the Rio San Mateo (St. Johns River) and to find out if that waterway emerged on the gulf coast.³ This command reflects Spain's hope of discovering an inland waterway so that the hazards of the Bahama Channel might be circumvented. It was believed that an inland passage could be effected by way of the Laguna Maymi (Lake Okeechobee), since an earlier expedition had reported that the Rio San Mateo originated in the lake. If another river connected the lake and the gulf coast, an alternate and less hazardous route for the treasure fleets would then be available.

In January 1604, Governor Ibarra found an opportunity to comply with the *cedula* while accomplishing another mission at the same time. Rumors of Spaniards being held prisoner by Indians at the Bay of Carlos (Charlotte Harbor) prompted him to dispatch an investigating party of twenty infantrymen, led by Captain Francisco Fernandez de Ecija. The governor ordered Ecija to search for the inland waterway after freeing the prisoners. The party proceeded to Carlos in a launch and apparently returned to St. Augustine by April.⁴ Although Ecija found no Spanish prisoners, the secondary purpose of his mission was fruitful, for he discovered two rivers which flowed from the Laguna Miami to the Bay of Carlos. Later that year, Ecija took another

3. "El Rey a Po de ybarra *gor* de la florida. Con lo q rresulta de Vna carta de su antecesor," Valladolid, September 23, 1603; in Spain, Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, "Registros: Reales ordenes y nombramientos dirigidos a autoridades y particulares de la Florida, 1570-1604," AGI 86-5-19 (often cited as *Cedulario de la Florida*), typed transcript in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, 355-56.

4. Pedro de Ibarra to de king, St. Augustine, April 12, 1604, AGI 54-5-9/49, photostat in the John B. Stetson Collection of Spanish Records, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville. Cited hereafter as Stetson Collection.

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exploring party from the territory of Ais, along the Indian River, and found that the headwaters of the Rio San Mateo were not in the Laguna Maymi, but rather were in a swamp. His report that no river connected the lake with the east coast crushed Spain's hopes for an inland passage.⁵

Upon submitting Ecija's report to the king in February 1605, Ibarra enclosed a map showing the river and the lake, as well as the Bay of Carlos and the coast of Florida:

. . . on the same map I show a spot where I think Your Majesty has been advised from many quarters that it is important to your royal service that a fort be built, where there would be one hundred men. It is in the same Bocas de Miguel Mora, from whence they would be able to provide shelter and assistance, in order that there might not perish as many people as are lost there when their ships cross the mouth of the Bahama Channel.⁶

Thus, Ibarra made specific reference to a map which indicated the suggested location of a fort to be constructed at the Bocas de Miguel Mora. Although absolute proof is lacking, it seems likely that the map described by Ibarra and the one which Lowery attributes to Posada are the same. The map was presumably a direct result of the Ecija expeditions, and it was likely drafted in the autumn of 1604, and certainly no later than January 1605.

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5. Ibarra to the king, St. Augustine, February 10, 1605, AGI 54-5-9, in "The Spanish Settlements within the Present Limits of the United States. Florida," unpublished manuscripts in the Woodbury Lowery Collection, vol. V. The Lowery Collection is in the Library of Congress and microfilm copies are available in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville.
 6. *Ibid.* The governor mentioned the fort and the map in two other letters, taken from the Stetson Collection: Ibarra to the king, St. Augustine, May 13, 1605, AC1 54-5-9/60; and Ibarra to the king (council of the Indies summary), July 10, 1605, in "Tanto de las diligencias que se hicieron Para atraer a la ouediencia de su magd las Provjas. de Sorruque y Aiz. de la banda del Sur destas Provincias. ano de 1605," AGI 54-5-9/61.