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CELI'S EXPEDITION TO TAMPA BAY: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

by CHARLES W. ARNADE *

“**D**E LA HAVANA AL PUERTO DE TAMPA, Año de 1757, Diario de Reconocimientos, Oceano Atlantico Septentrional” by Don Francisco Maria Celi is unquestionably a key document in Florida history and the history of Tampa Bay.¹ The chronology of its recent discovery is not too complicated. Celi, “Pilot of the Royal Spanish Navy” and commander of the Florida expedition, carefully prepared a useful and artistically beautiful map that went with his report.² This map (actually there were two versions) was known to modern historians, but the accompanying report was not. The late Clarence Simpson had knowledge of the Celi map,³ as did the Latin American history specialist, Arthur P. Whitaker, who made reference to it in 1931.⁴ Florida historian Mark F. Boyd and Florida archaeologist Ripley Bullen recalled having seen the map during the course of their research, but none of these social scientists had specified the archival origin or the historical particulars of the map.⁵

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1. *Oceano Atlantico Septentrional*, Vol. IIa, mss. 176, documento 5, in Museo Naval, Ministerio de Marina, Madrid, *passim*.
2. Charles W. Arnade, “Three Early Spanish Tampa Bay Maps,” *Tequesta*, XXV (1965), 83-96; John D. Ware, “Transcription and Translation of Legend of the Following Charts: ‘Great Bay of Tampa, Celi, 1757, . . . ,’” unpublished article, 17 pp., Florida Historical Society Library, University of South Florida, Tampa. When the author wrote his *Tequesta* article he had not yet seen the original Celi map(s) in Spain. In 1965 he studied these Celi map(s) and the questions and doubts raised in the article were solved. It suffices to say here that the map(s) (both versions) are of 1757; two copies were made and there were minor variations of details between them. The originals are not in color.
3. J. Clarence Simpson, *A Provisional Gazetteer of Florida Place-Names of Indian Derivation Either Obsolescent or Retained Together with Others of Recent Application*, edited by Mark F. Boyd (Tallahassee, 1956), 107.
4. Arthur P. Whitaker, *Documents Relating to the Commercial Policy of Spain in the Floridas* (DeLand, 1951), 156. Although this map is entitled “Map of Tampa Bay (Eighteenth Century),” it is in fact one of the Celi maps.
5. Personal conversations with Dr. Boyd and Dr. Bullen.

[1]

There are references to the Celi map in the Karpinski Collection of Copies of Early Maps of America (772 maps), William Clements Library of Americana, University of Michigan. While compiling an inventory of Florida maps in the Karpinski Collection, the author examined Professor Karpinski's notes and learned of the importance of the Spanish Naval Museum's holdings to Florida history.⁶ An investigation of the museum archives in 1964-1965 revealed that the Celi maps were an appendix to the Celi report. The two framed versions of the map now hang in the Naval Museum in Madrid with other maps from all over the world, including the invaluable De la Cosa map by Columbus' pilot.⁷ Thus the Celi map itself was no archival mystery, but as historians had shown only a passing interest in the full history of Tampa Bay no further inquiry into the map was made.⁸

The title of the Celi report is somewhat misleading since there was no port of Tampa then in existence. The whole bay area was unsettled except for some Indian clusters which were not under true Spanish tutelage. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Spain had little real control over the Florida peninsula except for St. Augustine, a narrow chain of small missions running toward Tallahassee, and a few military blockhouses on the coastal islands north of St. Augustine into Georgia.⁹ The area south of Gainesville (then the site of a mission) and St. Augustine was claimed by Spain, but it was not occupied. Little is known of the Spanish occupation of Florida's west coast at that time.

6. L. C. Karpinski, "'Introduction to the Karpinski Collection of Photographs of Maps in French, Spanish and Portuguese Archives relating to Colonial America,'" unpublished article in the Karpinski files, Map Room, William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; L. C. Karpinski, "Manuscript Maps relating to America in French, Spanish and Portuguese Archives," *American Historical Review*, XXXIII (January 1927), 328-30.

7. "Cartografia: la carta de Juan de la Cosa existente en el Museo Naval," in Cesareo Fernandez Duro, *Disquisiciones nauticas* (Madrid, 1876), I, 49-55; Julio Guillen, "Mapa mundi de Juan de la Cosa en el Museo Naval," Museo Naval, Madrid, document 1314, no. 6; David O. True, "Some Early Maps relating to Florida," *Imago Mundi* (Leiden, 1954), XI, 73-84.

8. Julio Guillen and Vicente Vela, *Museo Naval. Catalogo Guia* (Madrid, 1945), *passim*; Fernandez Duro, "Depositos hidrograficos," *Disquisiciones nauticas*, Libro cuarto (Madrid, 1879), 332-43; *El Deposito hidrografico. Testigos de una epoca que desaparecen* (Madrid, 1932), *passim*.

9. Charles W. Arnade, "The Failure of Spanish Florida," *Americas*, XVI (January 1960), 271-81.

The initial Spanish thrust into Florida in the sixteenth century was motivated by a desire for gold, silver, and other precious metals and to conquer the prosperous Indian nations that allegedly lived in the area. When it became obvious that there was neither treasure nor affluent Indians in Florida, Spain soon lost interest. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Spanish-American empire had begun to take shape, but the French, English, and later the Dutch were threatening Spain's claims to the vast territory - the whole American continent. As these great European powers started to make headway in North America, it became increasingly apparent to Spain that the Florida coastline was a vital area and that it needed protecting. Spain's renewed interest in Florida was only for the coastal areas however, not the interior. Her greatest concern was to protect the homebound fleet carrying gold and treasure from Mexico and Peru. For this reason Spain fortified the east coast, particularly St. Augustine and the surrounding area; the west coast was of secondary importance. With her hold over Mexico assured and since she was not yet faced with a direct threat from other European nations in the Mississippi Valley, Spain revealed even less interest in the Florida Gulf coast. In fact, by the end of the seventeenth century whatever knowledge Spain had of the west coast had been nearly lost. The sixteenth-century exploration of Florida, most of which began in the area around Tampa Bay, had been almost totally forgotten by the seventeenth century, and it was recalled by only a few historians. The logs and charts had been lost or had been misplaced in dusty files, or they were resting unconsulted in various archives.¹⁰

Suddenly with the approach of a new century, the eighteenth, Spain became intensely interested in the Gulf coast. The reason was quite simple - France had moved into the Mississippi Valley and was searching for a foothold on the Gulf, particularly near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Eventually this led to the establishment of New Orleans and Louisiana. In 1686 Spain began to search for the French interlopers, and twelve years later Pensacola was reestablished. As the Spanish and French positions took shape in that part of North America it became apparent that the struggle was for the Mississippi; the lower part of the Gulf

10. Irving A. Leonard, ed., *Documentos ineditos de Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Gongora* (Mexico, 1963), *passim*.

coast was still an area of secondary importance and it remained to be rediscovered.¹¹

Why there was a sudden interest in the rediscovery of the lower Gulf coast, particularly the Tampa Bay area, has not yet been fully determined. The Celi log has no real answer to this important historical question. The new expeditions to Tampa Bay, including the Franco expedition four months before the Celi journey, came around the middle of the eighteenth century and just a few years before the end of the first Spanish period in Florida in 1763.¹² Likely there were two reasons for these explorations. Late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century documents in the archives of Seville report several French attempts to sail up the Suwannee River.¹³ Naturally the Spanish were disturbed over these reports. If they were valid it meant that the French had pushed far southward into Florida, and if a foreign Power held the mouth of the Suwannee River it not only threatened Spain's nominal jurisdiction over the peninsula, but it also gave the French control over the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁴ And even more important, the Spaniards had vaguely mapped the Suwannee River, which they sometimes called San Martin, and they had begun to use it to ship lumber and cattle to Cuba in the eighteenth century. Cattle ranches were flourishing in the Gainesville and Palatka areas, probably reaching into what is now Gilchrist County.¹⁵ Contemporary documents show that the Spaniards had ambitious plans for developing the Suwannee River and apparently they had even started building a fort at its mouth.¹⁶ Appar-

11. W. E. Dunn, *Spanish and French Rivalry in the Gulf Region of the United States, 1678-1702* (Austin, 1917), *passim*.
12. Estado Mayor Central del Ejercito [Spain], Servicio Historico Militar, *Boletin de la Biblioteca Central Militar*, no. 5 (1949), 206; Juan Baptista Franco, "Descripcion de la Bahia de Tampa en la Florida," Havana, December 7, 1756, *passim*, unpublished mss. in author's possession.
13. Charles W. Arnade, "Florida History in Spanish Archives. Reproductions at the University of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (July 1955), 36-50.
14. Henry Folmer, *Franco-Spanish Rivalry in North America, 1524-1763* (Glendale, 1953), *passim*; Lawrence C. Ford, *The Triangular Struggle for Spanish Pensacola, 1689-1739* (Washington, 1939), *passim*; Dunn, *Spanish and French Rivalry*, *passim*.
15. Charles W. Arnade, "Cattle Raising in Spanish Florida, 1513-1763," *Agricultural History*, XXXV (July 1961), 116-24.
16. Stetson Collection catalog and calendar, 1735-1763. The John B. Stetson Collection is at the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville. A copy of the calendar is in the

ently, the Celi and Franco explorations of Tampa Bay were part of an overall plan to develop the Florida Gulf coast. Outlets, forts, and ports would be needed both to thwart the French and to enhance the expanding lumber and cattle economy of the area.

The Spaniards had never been satisfied with the communication by sea from St. Augustine to Havana, and there had always been a preference to sail on a calmer waterway from the Gulf coast to Cuba. Furthermore, Spain always believed that there was a water passage in Florida connecting the east and west coasts. Since they had failed to map the interior of the peninsula adequately, there was the hope that one of Florida's many rivers, including the Suwannee, might be this connection.¹⁷ Thus a foreign threat to any Florida river, especially the Suwannee since it lay due west of St. Augustine, was a threat to that settlement from the land side. All of these factors made it imperative to rediscover and remap the lower Gulf coast, especially the celebrated big body of water - Tampa Bay - where the great conquistadores of the sixteenth century - Narvaez and De Soto - had begun their inland marches. The Franco expedition and the more extensive Celi expedition into Tampa Bay in the mid-eighteenth century must be considered a part of the overall history of Spanish Florida.

There was yet another cause - removed from regional history - for these expeditions. Celi's journey into Tampa Bay is a classical example of the activities pursued by the new Bourbon dynasty in Spain, culminating in 1759, two years after the Celi and Franco expeditions, with the reign of the last great Spanish king, Charles III. In Europe this was the Age of Enlightenment, and in Spain there was a sudden inquiry into the natural sciences. Professor Arthur P. Whitaker notes that "Spain responded readily to the stimulus of the Enlightenment with a notable scientific revival" and that "the promotion of useful knowledge became an avowed purpose of the leaders of that movement [the Enlightenment] in Spain."¹⁸ Prior to the Bourbon Enlightenment,

St. Augustine Historical Society Library, St. Augustine, Florida, and a microfilm copy is in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History.

17. Charles W. Arnade, *Florida on Trial* (Coral Gables, 1959), *passim*.
18. Arthur P. Whitaker, ed., *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, 2d ed. (Ithaca, 1961), 12, 17.

Spain's main interest in America had been the exploitation of precious metals and military occupancy; now almost for the first time America had become a scientific curiosity. Great scientific expeditions, such as the celebrated Malaspina Expedition along the California and Alaska coasts, which included all kinds of scientists, were organized with instructions to map and chart the American coastlines.¹⁹

The Celi expedition lacked many features of the other voyages of the Bourbon period. It contained no botanists, zoologists, physicians, or trained geographers; it was entirely naval in both nature and purpose. Yet the pages of its report and the briefer Franco letter clearly show the influence of the Enlightenment and the Bourbon policy of stimulating scientific research and exploration. Thus the Celi report must be considered a document of the Age of Enlightenment. In this light it is also a most welcome document since Spanish Florida history is so restrictive and since it centers so much on military and defense matters. The great sweeps of history left Spanish Florida relatively unaffected but probably not as untouched as earlier research and study had indicated. The influence of the eighteenth-century Spanish Enlightenment did indeed touch Florida.

Often in history more questions are raised than are answered by the discovery of any new documentation. The Celi report is a vital document in Tampa Bay history and it introduces a new historical figure in the annals of early Florida, that of Francisco Maria Celi, chief of the expedition. Unfortunately, extensive search of the Spanish naval records has failed to reveal any biographical data on Celi. An examination of the naval documents and service records of the naval commanders and personnel in the colorful medieval palace of Admiral Alvaro de Bazan, Marques de Santa Cruz (1526-1588),²⁰ the great naval com-

19. Pedro de Novo y Colson, ed., *Viaje politico-cientifico alrededor del mundo por las corbetas descubierta y atrevida al mando de los capitanes de navio D. Alejandro Malaspina y D. Jose de Bustamante y Guerra desde 1789 a 1794* (Madrid, 1885), *passim*; Donald C. Cutter, *Malaspina in California* (San Francisco, 1960), *passim*; Bonifacio del Carril and Humberto F. Burzio, *La Expedicion Malaspina en los Mares Americanos del Sur* (Buenos Aires, 1961), *passim*; Museo Naval, Madrid, Malaspina Collection, Costa N. O. de America, Vol. I, No. 330.

20. Among the several biographies of Alvaro de Bazan the best is by Martin Fernandez de Navarrete in the 1830 report of the *Estado General de la Marina* (Madrid), appendix, 97-129. See also Angel del Altolaguirre y Duvalé, *Don Alvaro de Bazan. Estudio historico-biografico* (Madrid, 1888), *passim*.

mander of Philip II, located in the small isolated village of Viso del Marques in the Mancha (province of Ciudad Real) was fruitless.²¹ Likewise, the Naval Museum where most of the naval documents are still located, including the Celi maps and report, revealed no data on Celi.

The Celi report has many historical implications. It is our leading document showing the renewed interest of Spain during the eighteenth century to rediscover, chart, and settle the Florida Gulf coast with Tampa Bay as its main target. The Celi report is also an indication that the Spanish Age of Enlightenment - an outgrowth of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment-stimulated by the Bourbon dynasty and taking a scientific twist, had also reached Florida. Finally, the Celi document points out that as the historian searches for new Spanish colonial Florida sources he must look to other archives than Seville's Archive of the Indies whose Florida documentation has been photostated many years ago.²²

21. Julio F. Guillen y Tato, *El Palacio de Viso del Marques. Archivo Museo "Don Alvaro de Bazan"* (Ciudad Real, 1963), *passim*; Archivo General del Ministerio de Mariana de Espana, Fojas de servicio and Oficiales de Guerra, informes reservados in Archivo Alvaro Bazan, Viso del Marques, Province of Ciudad Real.
22. Ernest J. Burrus "An Introduction to Bibliographical Tools in Spanish Archives and Manuscript Collections Relating to Hispanic America," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XXXV (November 1955), 443-83; Jack Holmes, "Research Opportunities in the Spanish Borderlands," *Louisiana Studies*, I (No. 4, 1962), 1-19.