

## Spanish Florida: peoples, expeditions, and the effects of struggles and epidemics in the XVI and early XVII centuries

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*In our research work, we considered the expeditions of Ponce de Leon, Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón, Narváez and Hernando de Soto that took place in Spanish Florida in the XVI century, as well as the situation with the Catholic missions of the Spaniards in the late XVI and early XVII centuries. We have examined evidence of the origin and consequences of various epidemics that arose with the arrival of Europeans and their penetration into the interior of America and the expansion of the borders of Spanish Florida. The conclusions that follow from the article suggest that the peoples isolated from the external penetration of Europeans were able to avoid the terrible pandemics and severe consequences of epidemics. Those peoples who had direct contact with and took an active part in the life of the Europeans and their settlements suffered greatly from the rapid extinction. We would also like to show that not only the Europeans but also the aborigines themselves, had enough diseases that periodically killed the population and caused epidemics within the aboriginal society.*

*We would like to see further interdisciplinary research help to restore important points about the disappearance of American peoples and map the migration of indigenous tribes as a result of pandemics and epidemics.*

**Keywords:** *epidemic, Spanish Florida, Calusa, de Leon, de Soto, aborigines.*

## Іспанська Флорида: народи, експедиції і наслідки боротьби і епідемії в XVI – початку XVII століть

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*Стаття розглядає період XVI – початку XVII ст. досліджуються області іспанської Флориди і проникнення хвороб в середовище суспільства аборигенів з приходом європейців. Також показані хвороби і власні епідемії, існуючі в племенах самих індіанців. Висновки зі статті говорять про те, що суспільства аборигенів, що вступили в тісний контакт з європейцями, швидко зникали в результаті принесених хвороб і виниклих епідемій, а племена індіанців, що «самоізолюються» від європейців змогли надовго зберегти свою популяцію.*

**Ключові слова:** епідемії, Іспанська Флорида, Калуса, Нарваес, Де Сото, аборигени.

### **Испанская Флорида: народы, экспедиции и последствия борьбы и эпидемий в XVI – начале XVII веков**

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*Статья рассматривает период XVI – начала XVII вв. Исследуются области Испанской Флориды и проникновение болезней в среду общества аборигенов с приходом европейцев. Также показаны болезни и собственные эпидемии, существующие в племенах самих индейцев. Выводы из статьи говорят о том, что общества аборигенов, вступившие в тесный контакт с европейцами, быстро исчезали в результате принесенных болезней и возникших эпидемий, а племена индейцев, «самоизолирующиеся» от европейцев смогли надолго сохранить свою популяцию.*

**Ключевые слова:** эпидемии, Испанская Флорида, Калуса, Нарваэс, Де Сото, аборигены.

The introduction of a mass of unknown diseases and viruses from outside changed the population of tribes and populations on a huge territory of the earth, called Spanish Florida. This has become important in light of the current appearance of the virus and predictions of its consequences.

Our research brings to the surface a lot of disparate facts from the history of the Spanish conquest of the American continent in the XVI century, from the point of view of the current situation, analyzes the primary sources and their translations and shows new achievements in the field of bioarcheology about the consequences of infectious diseases.

The purpose and objectives of the study were to show how the intervention of the Spanish in the life of the natives as a result of the expeditions of the XVI century changed the population and relations between the peoples of Spanish Florida. And also, about how the external natural balance as a result of infections disturbed the natural balance in the territories where the expeditions took place.

The object of research was the situation that arose in the XVI century in connection with the penetration of Spanish expeditions to the territory of modern America in order to create settlements.

The subject of the study was Spanish Florida in the 16th century – a part of the American continent where Spanish expeditions took place, including the current States of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and other.

Since the author was located directly on the territory of Florida, Georgia, Texas, we used various artifacts and exhibits with descriptions in the research process when visiting museums such as the de Soto National memorial Museum, the Florida Museum of Natural history, as the basis for our work, we used books and articles by American scientists and researchers such as Meras [13], Gannon [5; 6], Milanich [14; 15], Marquart [12], Worth [24; 25], Peck [17; 19], Wood [23], Hann [10], Thompson [21], and Francis [3], Spanish primary sources from the archives of India, and materials from the libraries of the University of Florida, the University of South Florida, and the University of San Leo in Florida were also used. Also, works on bioarcheology [4] with data from European artifacts reflect the date range of 1525–1550 ad, as well as the burial of aborigines in Weeki Wachi, located near the expeditions of Pánfilo de Narváez and Hernando de Soto [11] and other works [22].

At the beginning of our study, we would like to point out some tribes which inhabited Florida in the XVI century, according to maps that were already available by the end of the XVI century.

These maps were compiled by numerous Spanish expeditions and the French, who attempted to establish a Huguenot colony in 1561 and conducted quite a lot of research around their landing site at the mouth of the St. Johns River, and then in Florida near St. Augustine. These maps were kindly provided from the collection of map copies in the University of Florida library and Saint Leo University library, we used Milanich's book about European invasion of Florida [14] and Theodore Morris, an artist-researcher who participates in all Florida museums to restore images of Indians of disappeared peoples [16].

Based on all these sources, we can say that the borders of Spanish Florida in the XVI century was the entire territory from Mexico to Virginia. The de Soto expedition crossed the lands of more than 80 tribes, extending the borders of Spanish Florida far to the West. We will list only some of the tribes such as Calos (Calusa), Tequesta, Jeaga, Mayaimi, Tokobaga, Mocoço, Jororo, Ais, Surruque, Mayaka, Guale, Mocama, Timucua, Apalachee, Tupique, Asao, Talaje, Bejesi, Tolomato, Potano, Ocale, Pensacola, Matecumbe, Utina, Acuera, Eloquale, Talamali, Coosa and many many others. Due to the limited scope of the article, we will continue to list them in subsequent works, specifically devoting them to maps of the peoples known at that time. And after that, the de Luna expedition passed through many lands of the modern United States. Under Menendez's governorship in 1565, these areas expanded inland and far North. Spanish Florida, according to maps of the time, included many of the current States up to South Carolina, where captain Juan Pardo reached on the orders of Pedro Menendez (the current city of Anderson in South Carolina) in 1566. The same captain Pardo went West from the Atlantic coast to the state of Tennessee, where he established relations with the Indians and left settlements [14, p. 162]. In 1570, an expedition was sent to the country of Gale to Christianize the population

[22, p. 8]. We can consider the borders of Spanish Florida in the 16th century from New Mexico to Virginia.

The Discovery of Florida (1513 AD). The first official expedition of the Spanish crown in Florida. We started our research at a point that is key to the Spanish penetration of Florida. This moment came in February 1512 as a result of a backstage struggle and past lawsuits between king Ferdinand II of Aragon and the Viceroy of the West Indies, Diego Columbus. Thus, the land plot can be the subject of the Spanish crown, which issued a contract called «Asiento de Juan Ponce de Leon» (Charter or Patent) [17, p. 2] Beimeni land (sic., Ada, Bimini and Florida) in Juan Ponce de Leon [1] – former Governor of San Juan (Puerto Rico) [28, p. 320–341]. According to the document, he had to organize an expedition to the North of the West Indies at his own expense to discover a New Land, marked on the maps of 1511 as Beimeni [17, p. 9]. The expedition took place in 1513 [7, p. 45]. The result of this expedition was the discovery of the Gulf stream (navigator Anton de Alaminos), a new unknown land called Pascua de Florida and a number of Islands, including Bimini. on the Florida coast, it was located at 28 degrees latitude in the vicinity of Melbourne beach, 125 miles South of the generally accepted location near St. Louis. Augustine, Florida [17, p. 18; 19]. Thus, there was no close or prolonged contact between the Spaniards and the natives of South Florida. Although Ponce de Leon landed several times on the Southeast coast of Florida and even installed a stone cross there and took an Indian interpreter on board the ship [2]. Ponce de Leon rounded the Peninsula [17, p. 3] and met strong resistance from the local Calusa (Calos or Kalusa) tribe near the present place called pine island. As a result of this expedition, a new place was discovered and announced that belonged to the Spanish crown. For this, Ponce de Leon received a coat of arms and a new Cedula in 1514 for the settlement of open lands (Cedula Real, Royal decree of 09 27 1514) [1, p. 45, 90].

Self-isolation as a factor of salvation from epidemics and loss of independence. Calusa tribe was unusual among other American tribes, as it was a society of fishermen-hunter-gatherers with a strict hierarchy that controlled South Florida at the time of the arrival of Europeans in 1513 [12; 21, p. 4–15]. This society was not agricultural, and 80 percent of its diet consisted of marine products, and this tribe was located in an important strategic place [8, p. 3–5; 21, p.77].

Taking on their land the Indians who constantly immigrated from Cuba and the Antilles as a result of the capture of these Spaniards, the Calusa Indians learned enough information about the Spaniards from the refugees [25, p. 3]. They waited for the arrival of the Spaniards and in 1513 twice attacked three ships of Ponce de Leon, who came to the shore. They attacked by the first time by 20 canoes, and the second time they used 80 canoes and [21, p. 6–7; 28, p. 346] they not allowed Spaniards to land on the shore of Florida.

Influenced by what the Indians who had fled Cuba had told them, Calusa decided to “self-isolate” themselves from the Spaniards, and in the following years resisted fiercely as soon as the Spanish ships reached their shores. After the victory of Cortes in New Spain (Mexico), many ships loaded with goods and gold were forced to circumnavigate all of Florida, and the Spanish fleet constantly suffered shipwrecks off the coast controlled by the Calusa tribes and their allies. Therefore, after the shipwreck, the cargo for Spain and the Christians themselves ended up in the hands of the Calusa Indians. The number of Christian prisoners reached 200 at a certain time. They were sacrificed and their heads

impaled on poles around the capital of Calusa, named Mount Key. And at the time of 1566, about 12 people remained in captivity [14, p. 165].

In order to establish a good relationship with Calusa as an important strategic partner and find a safe river route through Florida to stop the mass destruction of their ships, the Spaniards tried to establish friendship and in 1566–1569 even founded the mission of Sant Antony de Calusa. However, the Spaniards soon left due to conflicts, Indian resistance, and the inability to maintain soldiers there. Thus, the Calusa society opened only once in 1566, that is, almost 50 years after their first meeting with Ponce de Leon in 1513 and closed in 1569 for another 50 years and was in “self-isolation”. The Europeans had nothing to offer for the development of Calusa society – they did not need iron products to work in the fields, they did not need Spanish weapons, because, as a practice has shown, their organized army with a standing army coped with the repulse and aggression from neighbors and with the suppression of uprisings in their country and was sufficiently organized to repel the Spaniards. They received new benefits in their lives from frequent shipwrecks, and they were offered to use them by Christians who were taken captive after shipwrecks [20, p. 281]. They were also excellent fishermen and made fine canoes and catamarans, for which they were famous among other tribes. Their achievements, ideas, and skills in fishing were used and learned by the Cuban Indians, who became famous fishermen. Thus, the Calusa Indians remained isolated from the Spanish invasion for a long time, maintaining their population and remaining a fairly strong tribe from the XVI to the end of the XVII and early XVIII centuries.

Insignificant contacts between the Spaniards and the natives (1514–1520). This was followed by several visits to open Florida. In 1514, Pedro de Salazar captured the Indians from the coast of Florida, in 1516, Diego Miruelo, who followed the expedition in 1513, on the orders of Diego Columbus, made a circumnavigation of Florida. Pilot Anton de Alaminos, who was in Ponce de Leon, led ships to the coast of Florida as a pilot to Francisco Hernandez de Córdoba (1517), Juan de Grijalva (1518), and then to the expeditions of Alonso de Pineda in 1519 and Francisco Gordillo in 1520, who also captured Florida Indians as slaves for sale in Hispaniola [14, p. 110–112].

He spent several days setting up camp, and missionaries came with him, bringing horses, domestic animals, and plant seeds [23, p. 3], but he was constantly attacked by the natives of Calusa. Determined to put an end to the attacks, Pons marched against the Indians at the head of a party. As a result of the shootout, he was severely wounded in the hip. It was decided to take the injured Governor of Florida to Cuba for treatment. However, Pons died on the way. The settlement existed for several months, but was abandoned [19, p. 103]. Thus, there was no close contact between the Calusa natives and the Spaniards.

Third official expedition to Florida. Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón (1526 AD). After the death of Ponce de Leon, all rights to the governorship, development and establishment of the settlement were granted in 1523 to Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón which was the Royal judge of the Hispaniola Island, whose ship participated in the 1520 capture of the Florida Indians into slavery [19, p. 104–106].

He landed on September 29, 1526 at the mouth of the St. John river in Wateree, but soon moved to Chesapeake, where Jamestown is now located [19, p. 106–107] and established a settlement. In addition to the Spaniards, there were also slaves from Africa in the settlement [6, p. 3]. The location of Sapelo Island was chosen unsuccessfully. The settlers supplies ran out, winter began, the soil was barren, and people were freezing and sick.

An epidemic broke out among the settlers. It was the plague – pestilential fever. It quickly spread through the camp. Ayllon fell ill from the disease and died in the hands of a priest [6 p. 3–4]. Then the rising black revolt and there was the wrong policy of the Spanish against the Indians. 150 Spaniards forced to break camp and leave this place in the next in the spring of 1527 [19, p. 107] due to these events.

So, the first sustainable settlement in Florida brought the first diseases to the natives. Namely, the plague and cholera along with stale water. The outbreak quickly spread beyond the camp and reached the Indians. Its consequences were seen by the subsequent de Soto expedition in 1539.

In 1540, the de Soto's expedition passed through the entire territory of modern states Florida and Georgia and came to the place where the colony of Ayllon was founded. In this area, De Soto saw many abandoned aboriginal villages and leaved houses which were overgrown with grass. This was told by an eyewitness of the expedition («the Indians said that two years before there was a plague in this country, and that they returned to other cities») [9, p. 56–57] – an anonymous Portuguese gentleman from Elvas, whose memoirs were published in 1557 in Portugal, and then-in 1861 in London [9]. When the Spaniards asked the Indians living there what had happened, the natives replied that the Spaniards, who had arrived long ago under the leadership of Ayllon, had brought with them a disease that had claimed many lives and ended only two years before the arrival of the de Soto expedition. Thus, if the expedition to the island of Ayllon was from 1526–1527 AD, and de Soto came in 1540 AD, then the plague epidemic lasted about 10–12 years and ended only when people moved far from the places where they lived before, leaving their lands and homes. This happened on the rich and fertile land of the Indians with the capital of Cutif-Chiqui [9, p. 57].

It must also be said that before this, during the entire campaign from the landing in the Central part of Florida in the modern Bay of Tampa, the Spaniards did not observe large desert areas between Indian settlements. The only thing is the ferocity with which the natives met the expedition.

Leaving the chief of Patofa, bordering on an area where there were abandoned villages, the Spaniards went with guides to a rich camp. Indian guides talked about a rich country in 4–5 days of travel. However, the Spaniards passed 9 days, and there were no settlements around. A wide, well-trodden road gradually ended in dense shrubbery. The Spaniards broke up the camp with the last of their strength, blamed the Indian interpreter for everything, and even wanted to burn it. The Indian even under torture said that he did not understand what happened [9, p. 49]. The horses and men were starving. The Spaniards even let the Indian porters go, because they had nothing to feed them with. The whole expedition was threatened with a terrible famine. The riders found no sign of life around them. And only Juan Danusco found a settlement of 12 leagues from the Parking lot. From this episode, it can be judged and hypothesized that the plague forced the natives who lived between the neighboring areas of Patofa and Okute and the area of Cutifa-Chiqui, where the plague is mentioned in the above narrative, to leave their places and villages.

Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez (1526 AD). Once Ayllón died, the vacant seat of the Governor of Florida was given to Panfilio de Narvaez. The pilot of Narvaez was Diego de Miruelo [27, p. 116], who followed the ships of Ponce as early as 1513 and sailed to the coast of Florida in 1516. Soon Narvaez saw the yellow color of a river flowing in

Florida. In addition, he found gold in the homes of the Indians near the bay where he landed (modern Tampa Bay). The Indians told him about the rich land of Appalachia [27]. This situation led him to believe that Florida was full of gold. He did not know that the yellow color is inherent in the nature of the rivers of Florida because of the specifics of the soil, and not the content of this metal (as it appears from the description of natural rivers in Florida (now you can see the yellow color of water of many rivers in Florida – author K. A.).

Narvaez, passing to the North of Tampa Bay saw fields of corn and realized that it was possible to move into without having supplies [15, p. 116]. This was of interesting strategic significance for him and subsequent expeditions.

There were epidemics among Spaniards and Indians during the expedition.

On the road, after the crash in Mexican Gulf, only 15 of the 80 exhausted Spaniards remained, some of them began to eat each other. All the Spaniards were sick and weak. They died during winter one by one. And after a while, an epidemic started among the Indians of tribes Kapoki and Anami which helped and sheltered Spaniard. It was an epidemic of cholera with a very big stomachache [27, p. 55]. In a short time, almost half of the population of the people who sheltered the Spaniards died [27, p. 51–53].

The expedition of De Soto found skulls of horses, cut down trees near the Indian city of Ochete (modern Tallahassee). There were stacked boards for preparing rafts, on which the remaining members of the expedition went to the Gulf of Mexico and most of them died [9, p. 44–45].

The de Soto's expedition was made on a grand scale. It passed as mentioned above through 80 different peoples inhabiting the American continent, its path passed through the modern States from Florida and Georgia to Texas (there is a hypothesis of the professor Donald E. Sheppard that the Spaniards in this expedition reached the Great Lakes [26].

The expedition started from the same place where Parfilo Narvaez started his journey – in Tampa Bay, where on May 30, 1539, De Soto landed 2 leagues from the Indian city with a local cacique named Uzita [9, p. 24] de Soto's Expedition met the survivor of Juan Ortiz from the previous expedition and went along the road of Narvaez, often finding the remains of his camps.

The Spaniards from the de Soto's expedition visited three times the place has named Weeki Wachi. The human remains were found here after the excavation and the investigation of these places [11]. It was indicating death from infection. Archaeologists have suggested that after several contacts with the Spaniards who passed along this route from the de Soto expedition, people died of starvation. infection. It was said that people died in those places from malnutrition, infection, metabolic disorders, staphylococcal bacteria, purulent bacteria, osteomyelitis were found due to purulent bacteria in the tissues [9, p. 59].

During the passage through the territory of the modern United States, the Spaniards constantly engaged in battles with the tribes of the interior. For example, tribes in the area of the current state of Alabama. As a result of a direct collision, the Europeans introduced a mass of disease – causing viruses that left vast territories empty and abandoned. It was they who encountered the de Luna expedition 20 years later when they explored the part of the earth where de Soto's soldiers had already passed [9, p. 147].

Paleopathological data indicate that indigenous peoples throughout the Americas lived in a world where infectious diseases and poor health were not uncommon [4, p. 71].

Missions and the era of diseases of the Spanish Indians of Florida. In 1565, Menendez founded the city of St. Augustine on the East coast of Florida. It became the main city from which the Christianization of all Spanish Florida began. It was particularly successful in the late sixteenth century. However, diseases came altogether with the missionaries from St. Augustine. Documentary evidence can be found about the events of 1595, when the villages of Timucua were hit by a severe epidemic of measles [14, p. 215–216], followed by epidemics of plague and smallpox in 1600 [14, p. 217], which destroyed the population of Indian's tribes of Guale and Timucua by 1650 AD.

After the mission system was established in the country of Guale and Timucua aborigines in what is now the state of Georgia and throughout Spanish Florida, infections began to spread rapidly. This led to rapid extinction of the local inhabitants. At the end of the sixteenth century, there was a system of missions, and there was a practice of natives coming to work in St. Augustine, which was the capital of Spanish Florida and then returning. According to Hanna, borrowing melanin at this point caused the worst outbreaks of the epidemic in 1612–1616, when the death rate was appalling. According to scientists, the death rate of the Timucua Indians was so high that from about 150,000 people in 1492 (before the discovery of America) it fell to 3,230 in 1689, which means that only two percent of the original population remained [14, p. 217]. Although the mass death of Indians during hostilities between the Spaniards and the natives was not observed during this period.

The expeditions of Narvaez, Ayllon, de Soto and de Luna passed through dozens of different villages covering different habitats of the aborigines, forever changing their worldview and disturbing the delicate balance of the ecosystem and affecting the future of the aborigines. The impact on the lives of Spaniards was unprecedented, as they brought with them many diseases from which the local population was not immune. Their way of life and perception of the world changed forever [14, p. 120, 130, 159].

The first conclusion of the study is that the sudden appearance of Spaniards on the coast and further advance into the American continent caused huge changes in the population in the territory called in the XVI century Spanish Florida, extending from the modern state of Florida to Mexico. The progress of each Spanish expedition and penetration into the interior of the continent led to the devastation of vast territories and the extinction of the population due to introduced diseases caused by viruses unknown to the natives and destroying entire peoples [14, p. 218]. The second conclusion concerns self-isolation. We see an interesting example of the tribe of Calusa, who did not depend on seasonality, did not cultivate the land, but lived in estuaries and fed on the year-round gifts of the sea (the Gulf of Mexico). The self-isolation of these people was able to keep them away from the Spaniards and from the mass deadly epidemics that they carried for almost 200 years. Although their future fate is sad, however, this is already associated with the movement of Indian peoples to their borders. In other words, we see an example of isolation through violent resistance and exclusion of Spanish settlements in this territory, which prolonged the existence of the population of «self-isolated» tribes for a long time.

The third important conclusion. It is also important to note that viruses and diseases already existed on the territory of Spanish Florida and, as shown by the excavations, bioarcheologists and pathologists, many came from the New World. they suffered from epidemics and viruses, lack of food and bad water, parasitic infections, and so on. Therefore, it is wrong to blame only the Spaniards for the death of all the natives. Because



life in America before the arrival of Europeans was not Paradise and serene, did not know any epidemics. This representation is an illegal and unacceptable simplification.

We see a direct parallel with the events of 400–500 years ago and the current situation in connection with the pandemic and the measures taken by the authorities in different parts of the world by the example of the isolation of entire regions and countries.

We hope in the future to attract scientists from different fields and create a dynamic map that could reflect the dynamics of the population of Spanish Florida and various infectious foci, both local and imported, indicating the diseases inherent in the natives of different places and the consequences of the spread of infections to both natives and Spaniards.

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