

1993

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Recommended Citation

Coker, William S. (1993) "Some Observations From and About the Luna Papers," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 72 : No. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol72/iss2/7>

SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM AND ABOUT THE *LUNA PAPERS*

by WILLIAM S. COKER

SEVERAL articles written in the last few years about the hurricane of 1559 that hit Pensacola Bay, then the Bahía Filipina del Puerto de Santa María, have inadvertently given the wrong date, August 19, 1559, when the hurricane struck. It seems appropriate to correct this error to prevent it from perpetuating, and the *Luna Papers* provide the necessary information.¹ This note also provides an opportunity to mention several other noteworthy aspects of the *Luna Papers*.

The error in the date of the hurricane can be traced to Herbert Ingram Priestley's two-volume *Luna Papers, 1559-1561*. In the introduction Priestley states that the storm hit on "the night of August 19, five days after the arrival" of the Spaniards at Pensacola Bay.² But Luna's letter to King Philip dated September 24, 1559, specifically stated that the hurricane struck on September 19, 1559.³ Which is the correct date?

A further examination of the *Luna Papers* reveals a letter from the viceroy of New Spain, Luis de Velasco, to the king, dated September 24, 1559.⁴ In this letter the viceroy stated that Luna had sent a ship to New Spain (Mexico) which departed Pensacola on August 25 with full news of what had happened in the settlement to that date. The ship reached San Juan de Ulúa, present-day Veracruz, on September 9. Luna said nothing

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1. Herbert Ingram Priestley, *The Luna Papers: Documents Relating to the Expedition of Don Tristán de Luca Arellano for the Conquest of La Florida in 1559-1561*. 2 vols. (Deland, FL, 1928).
2. *Luna Papers*, I, xxxvi.
3. *Luna Papers*, II, 243-47.
4. *Ibid.*, 269-77.

about a hurricane striking Pensacola Bay. Thus it is quite obvious that the correct date must be September 19, not August 19, 1559.⁵

There are several other matters in the *Luna Papers* that merit attention. The first concerns a reference to the Río del Espíritu Santo— the Mississippi River— also called the Río Grande de Espíritu Santo.⁶ Priestley wrote of an expedition by Sergeant Major Mateo del Sauz, who left Nanipacana on April 15, 1560, with a party of some 200 soldiers, officers, and priests. They journeyed to the Coosa country in the northwestern corner of Georgia.⁷ There they joined forces with the Coosas, whom the Spaniards considered their allies, to defeat the rebellious Napochies. Priestley described the outcome as follows: “In this enterprise the major’s detachment pursued the enemy across the ‘Big Water,’ called by the Coosas the Oquechiton, by [Fray Augustin] Dávila Padilla the Espíritu Santo, and by us the Mississippi.”⁸ This reference to the Napochies fleeing the Coosa country all the way to the Mississippi River, some 300-plus miles, is obviously an error. The “Big Water” to which the Napochies fled was the nearby Tennessee River and not the Mississippi. Dr. Charles Hudson, the noted ethnohistorian, agreed that Priestley erred in stating that the Napochies fled to the Mississippi River.⁹

But these two little errors should not detract from the overall excellence of the *Luna Papers*. The papers are still the best source for information on the Luna expedition.

Most scholars in discussing the Luna expedition have failed to make clear that the plans for the expedition called for the creation of two provinces: La Florida and Punta de Santa Elena. Luna was to govern both provinces.¹⁰

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5. Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast during the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1990), 159, states that the hurricane hit on September 19, 1559.
 6. *Luna Papers*, I, 49.
 7. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia*, 95.
 8. *Luna Papers*, I, xliii. See Fray Augustin Dávila Padilla, *Historia de La Fundación y Discurso de la Provincia de Santiago de Mexico. . . .*, 2nd ed. (Brussels, 1625), 207-17, esp. 215. Two well-known colonial historians, Robert S. Weddle and Patricia K. Galloway, have recently stated that they believe Dávila Padilla made up this story about Major Sauz chasing the Napochies across the Mississippi River and that no such event ever took place.
 9. Conversation with Charles Hudson, April 19, 1993.
 10. *Luna Papers*, I, 49-51.

The western boundary of the two provinces was to begin fifty leagues west of the Río Grande de Espíritu Santo (the Mississippi). A line was to be drawn from the Gulf coast "toward the north," and the two provinces would lie east of that line.¹¹ The natives in those provinces were to be subjugated and Christianized.¹²

While the western boundary was clearly defined, the other borders of the two provinces were not specified except that the Coosa country would be under the jurisdiction of Punta de Santa Elena once that site was occupied.¹³ Of course, one of the objectives of the expedition was to march inland and establish settlements through the Coosa country and on to Punta de Santa Elena.¹⁴

As to the boundaries between La Florida and Punta de Santa Elena, according to Spanish law the boundary of one municipality extended to the boundary of the next. Thus when the second town, Punta de Santa Elena, was established, the boundary between the two would have to be created and recognized. Since the Luna expedition never established a town at Punta de Santa Elena, a second colony never existed between 1559 and 1561. Therefore, Luna actually commanded only one colony, La Florida, with its capital at Bahía Filipina del Puerto de Santa María (Pensacola). Thus the first capital of La Florida was Pensacola.

11. *Ibid.*, 49. In 1753 the boundary of La Florida was extended westward to the Pánuco River in northeastern Mexico. The audiencia of Mexico City objected to that intrusion into territory claimed by the viceroyalty of New Spain. See Hoffman, *A New Andalusia*, 268.

12. *Luna Papers*, I, xxxi-xxxii, 49-53.

13. *Luna Papers*, II, 155.

14. *Ibid.*; Hoffman, *A New Andalusia*, 144.