

# **“Trinkets” of the Spanish Luna Colony on Pensacola Bay**

## **(Trade Items that Became Artifacts)**

by:

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The earliest Spanish expeditions that came to the mainland of the current Southeastern United States knew what the Natives wanted ... “trinkets,” as the Spanish called them.

The Spanish had learned that fact from earlier exploratory expeditions, including those of Columbus. The Natives highly sought objects they had rarely seen before, objects outside their culture: iron objects such as chisels, wood wedges, axes; colorful glass beads; red cloth ribbons and the like. The Natives did not use coinage for exchanges. They bartered for items they desired. That barter system had existed for thousands of years. The Spanish quickly recognized that system and used it to their advantage. It worked to their advantage.

The European trade items went directly to the Native leaders. The leaders did not “share.” The trade items were symbols of their authority and the hierarchy of their families. The trade items went into the graves of the leaders ... thus, becoming artifacts that today act as important “markers” of the time period of European contacts with Native groups along the routes of early Spanish expeditions such as Narvaez (1520s), Soto (1530s-40s), and Luna (1550s-60s). This article focuses specifically on the 16th-Century Spanish trade items found on Pensacola Bay, Florida, and the historic documents that confirm their original existence and purpose.

### **Historic Documental Evidence of Trade Goods: The Spanish Luna Expedition 1559-1562**

The documental records of the Luna expedition give direct and indirect evidence of trade goods brought to la Florida, not on a whim, but under the directive of the mastermind behind the Luna Expedition—Viceroy Luis de Velasco. The viceroy had done his homework in preparation of the 1559 Luna Expedition to Pensacola Bay. His letters mentioning aspects of the 1539 Soto expedition provide us with the evidence of his knowledge of the importance of trade items in the Spanish interaction with the Native populations of la Florida. The following quotes from various Spanish documents refer directly to Spanish trade goods and the Native populace.

One document dated August 23, 1558, relates the directive from the Viceroy concerning a 1558 reconnaissance expedition to Pensacola Bay by Captain Guido de Bazares in preparation for the larger Luna Colony Expedition the following year:

*“... these people (Spaniards) must ... at no time ... do anything harmful to the Indians nor fight with them nor start anything against their will before they give them some trade goods free and give them good treatment (all underling added for emphasis).”* (Childers 1999).

In other words, the Spanish King, through his Mexican Viceroy, ordered the leader of the Spanish scouting expedition, Bazares, to use his trade goods to deal peacefully with the Natives and not to instigate violence against them. The trade goods were the white flag of peace.

Also, in the same Spanish document, concerning goods received by Captain Bazares for his exploratory voyage, at least two chests of trade goods were included:

*"... 2 leather-covered chests in which were packed 2 little boxes of trade goods for the Indians"* were included in his cargo (Childers 1999).

The “two little boxes” might have contained glass beads or red ribbons or some other small trade items. The point is that it is certain that the Spanish knew to take items of trade to interact with Native groups as the King of Spain had directed.

The first mention of trade goods after the Luna fleet arrived in Pensacola Bay was concerning a twenty man expedition traveling up a river flowing into the bay. The river was likely the Escambia River. The mission assigned to the men was to solicit help from the Natives. The Spanish colonists were in dire straits. The Spaniards needed food. The military captain in charge was given an order by Luna himself to trade “trinkets” to the Natives for their help:

*... if you are to see Indians endeavor by signs or as to be able to give them to understand how you go in the name of his Majesty with all this army ... and thus you will give them of the trinkets that we carried ...* (David Dodson research files).

Another mention of trade items during the Luna Expedition came from a scouting expedition into the interior by Sargent-Major Sauz and Captain Don Cristóbal. They marched with 150 soldiers north to the inland Native town of Nanipacana in early October of 1559. When the Spanish reconnaissance party arrived at the town, the Native people fled across the Alabama River in fear of their lives. The Spaniards coaxed the Natives back to the town with the seduction of trade goods:

*They commenced to call the Indians who had fled, with kindness and tenderness; and with some things that they gave to them from that which was brought from New Spain, they won their good will, having them very much at their disposal ... The Indians wished them well, because for one they did not do anything bad to them, and for the other, they gave them trinkets of broad silk ribbons (two fingers wide), and several glass beads, which they prized for their novelty* (Padilla 1596).

A Spanish friar, Dávila Padilla, also wrote of Spanish trade items related to the Luna Expedition and the Natives. A Spanish scouting expedition had arrived at the Coosa Chiefdom in northern Alabama.

*Through the interpreters they carried, they communicated with the Indians, and gave them some goods in exchange for maize, which were the greatest gifts that could be desired by both parties. The Spaniards had the need to eat, and they found corn kernels in those banks (or corn cribs): and the Indians did not want money, because they had never used any type of money in all their antiquity: what goods they esteemed the most, and appreciated on this occasion (were) the Colonial ribbons, and trinkets of colored beads which they gave them* (Padilla 1596).

Sargent-Major Sauz also wrote a letter from Coosa to the Spanish Settlement on the lower Alabama River in June of 1560. He wrote of his need of trade goods and his debt to the Natives for their help:

*We also need some things to trade, for we have none, and I owe more than the king possesses* (Priestley 1928).

A Spanish friar on the Luna Expedition, Domingo de la Anunciation, also gave us a reference to Spanish trade goods with his letter from the Spanish camp in the Native Chiefdom of Coosa to the Alabama River Spanish settlement. The Spanish scouting party was in serious trouble with their health. They were near exhaustion. The Natives helped them ... in exchange for “trinkets.”

*When the Indians go back we give them some trifle (“trinkets”), with which they go away well content* (Priestley 1928).



Public Domain Image, Soto National Memorial, Bradenton, Florida.

Native Warrior.  
Public Domain Image.



INDIAN IN BODY PAINT [no. 52a, cf. pl. 81(a), 121(b)]

## Historic Trade Goods Became Artifacts

The previous pages of this article have demonstrated the richness of the historical records of the earliest Spanish expeditions into the current Southeastern United States relative to the trade objects the Spanish brought with them.

The Spanish expeditions eventually left the region. They left behind untold numbers of those trade objects with the Native peoples, some of which have been found in archeological context. Those objects are extremely important to archeologists relative to sites associated with early European contacts with Native peoples.

The objects are considered “marker artifacts” that indicate the presence of early Spanish contacts as opposed to later periods. Decades of detailed archeological research by many archeologists have resulted in the identification of these artifact types. Today, archeologists in the Southeastern United States, on occasion, find rare remains of some of these “marker artifacts” on early Spanish contact sites.

The artifact types include colorful glass beads manufactured in Italian and Spanish towns of the northern Mediterranean region. Archeologists have given the beads names such as: Nueva Cadiz, Faceted Chevrons, Gooseberry, and others.

Distinctive metal artifacts have also been identified as associated with early Spanish contact sites. They include, among others: celts, knives, swords, spikes, tacks, nails, brass bells, Spanish coins (silver, copper, gold), gun parts, spear points, axes, crossbow parts, equestrian items, and others.

Various pottery types, some colorful and some mundane, have also been identified as marker artifacts of the early Spanish contact period. A sample of these include: Spanish Olive Jars (early styles), Yayal Blue on White, Green Bacin, Columbia Plain, Isabela Polychrome, Santo Domingo Blue on White, Caparra Blue, and others.

Some of these early Spanish contact artifact types have been found at five archeological sites on Pensacola Bay. Research projects are being conducted around the bay by Contact Archeology Inc. as well as by the University of West Florida to locate the actual site of the Spanish Luna Colony of 1559 and associated sites.

The following page contains a sample of early Spanish contact artifacts found on Pensacola Bay and Southwest Alabama. Updates of our research are presented on the website of Contact Archeology Inc. ([archeologyink.com](http://archeologyink.com)). The research is ongoing.

Initiating Test Excavations at a Site on Pensacola Bay,  
Contact Archeology Inc.  
2016



## A Sample of Diagnostic 16th-Century Spanish Artifacts from Pensacola Bay and S.W. Alabama

(axe, horseshoe, crossbow parts, knives, blacksmith stock, spear point, horse bridle, gun barrel, spike, chisel, glass beads, coin, clothing buttons, majolica pottery sherd)



## Summary and Conclusions

The Luna Expedition carried numerous items to trade with Native peoples they encountered on Pensacola Bay and the interior of Florida and Alabama. The European objects included glass trade beads, iron and brass objects, colorful ribbons, and others. These objects were extremely valuable to the Natives due to the fact that the items were foreign to Native cultures. Those special items went directly to the leaders of the various societies encountered by the Luna Expedition and earlier expeditions. As was the custom at the time, the trade objects went into the graves of the leaders when they died. Archeologists use those trade objects to help trace the locations and movements of the early European expeditions through the Southeastern United States, thus, learning more about the anthropology of the Natives and the Spanish. The translations of historic documents of the 16th Century are extremely valuable to archeologists studying the early European-Native contacts in the Southeast. This research article provides specific evidence of that value.



16th-Century Spanish Glass Trade Beads from the Lower Alabama River (1Ba462)

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