

Glass Beads from the Alleged UWF 16th-Century Spanish Luna Colony Site, Pensacola Bay, Florida

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In December of 2015, The University of West Florida (UWF) claimed that they had found the site (8Es1) of the 1559 Spanish Expedition of Tristan de Luna on Pensacola Bay, Florida (Meyer 2015).

Currently, after almost two years of UWF excavations, an array of Spanish artifacts mixed with Native artifacts have been found at the site. Among the Spanish artifacts are ten glass trade beads including three Nueva Cadiz beads, six faceted chevron beads and one seed bead. The glass beads reveal much about the nature of the Native site and the conclusions publicized by the University of West Florida terrestrial archeologists. The following points are presented relative to the issue:



*Glass beads from the UWF alleged Luna Colony Site (8Es1) on Pensacola Bay.
top row: three Nueva Cadiz beads and one seed bead.
bottom row: six Faceted Chevron beads, seven layers.
Photo by John Worth, UWF archeologist.*

Point #1: The UWF logic concerning these glass beads appears to be flawed. UWF starts out with the assumption that the site is the location of the Luna Colony ... so the beads must be from the Luna Expedition.

(The glass beads are) *very rare, called Nueva Cadiz beads. We've found two of them now in different locations (on the site) from where we found our first one. So, in other words, we've firmed up the idea that these little glass trade beads were indeed part of the typical equipment that most of the Spaniards on site had to trade for food and other items with the local Southeastern Indians.* (Worth, from Averhart, Aug. 9, 2017).

A more objective approach would have been to first examine the archeological record from other sites in the Southeast and determine the time span of the beads without presupposing that the beads were from the alleged Luna Colony.

Point #2: A number of respected archeologists in the Southeast have noted that Nueva Cadiz beads date to the first half of the 1500s. The Luna Expedition dates from the second half of the 1500s. Therefore, the UWF claim that Nueva Cadiz beads support their claim of the Luna Colony location is not substantiated by the archeological record.

Beads of Spanish colonial Nueva Cadiz occur only at sites with a pre-1550 occupation, and are absent at sites dating to the second half of the sixteenth century ... (Deagan 1987:163).

... certain types of artifacts are very useful for dating early sixteenth-century site ... One glass bead type (Nueva Cadiz beads) has proven especially valuable in identifying sites of this time period ... (Mitchem 1990:52).

Point #3: Although not as diagnostically time definitive as the Nueva Cadiz beads, archeologists have noted that Faceted Chevron beads can be indicators of Spanish/Native contacts early in the 1500s particularly when found in combination with Nueva Cadiz beads. The beads from the UWF site are all faceted, perhaps indicating a date earlier than the Luna Colony particularly since the three Nueva Cadiz beads were also found at the site. *The earliest varieties (Faceted Chevrons) are generally, although not exclusively, faceted (Smith 1983:148).*

Point #4: It is also an important fact that in all of the decades of excavations carried out at St. Augustine only one Nueva Cadiz bead has ever been found (personal communication, Jeffrey Mitchem, 2017). Also, in all the decades of excavations at Santa Elena no Nueva Cadiz beads have been found. Both settlements were initially occupied shortly after the Luna Colony on Pensacola Bay. These facts lend credence to the idea that the Nueva Cadiz beads found at the alleged UWF Luna Colony actually predate the colony.

Point #5: There was a Native village and two Native burial mounds at the site (8Es1) according to the Smithsonian Institution (Walker 1885:854-855; Willey 1949:200; Curren 2016:1-2). Spanish artifacts of gift and trade have been found in Native burial mounds in parts of the Southeast. Spanish expeditions of the late 1400s and 1500s often brought large quantities of trade items with them to the New World. Glass beads were primary items of gifts and trade to the Natives. The Spanish usually dealt with the leaders of Native towns and villages to make those trades or gifts. Later, when the Native leaders died, those special items were buried with them, often times in mounds of earth constructed for the purpose. The glass trade beads found by UWF likely came from the two burial mounds reported by the Smithsonian. The mounds were probably leveled during the early 20th-Century for residential development. Any trade or gift items buried with Native leaders in the mound would have scattered over a large area. This might well account for the glass beads and some of the other small items found by UWF at site 8Es1.

Point #6: 16th-Century Spanish glass trade beads from three Native mound sites in central Florida are good examples of the presence of early Spanish beads in Native mounds. The key is the Nueva Cadiz and perhaps the faceted chevron bead types. The three sites include the Weeki Wachee Mound (8He12), the Ruth Smith Mound (8Ci200), and the Tatham Mound (8Ci203).

At the Weeki Wachee Mound, ... All of the (127) glass beads were early sixteenth-century types (including Nueva Cadiz and faceted chevrons) ... (Mitchem 1990:55).

At the Ruth Smith Mound, ... The glass beads (32) included Nueva Cadiz and faceted chevrons varieties, indicating an early sixteenth-century date. (Mitchem 1990:56).

At the Tatham Mound, ... The beads (153) included Nueva Cadiz, faceted chevron, and other early sixteenth-century types. (Mitchem 1990:56).

Two other important archeological sites in Northwest Florida and South Georgia also support the contention that Nueva Cadiz and even Faceted Chevron beads date to pre-1550 and thus, do not provide evidence for the UWF alleged Luna Colony location.

A dozen Faceted Chevron beads and a single Nueva Cadiz bead were found at an encampment of the 1539 Soto Expedition in Tallahassee, Florida known as the Martin Site (8Le853B). It was reported that the Faceted Chevron beads were similar to those from the Tatham Mound in central Florida, a 1540 Soto and/or a 1528 Narvaez contact site (Ewen 1988:5).

Another important early Spanish contact site is the Glass Site in the Ocmulgee River drainage in south-central Georgia. Spanish glass beads were found on the site and included both Faceted Chevrons and Nueva Cadiz. The site is considered a 1540 Soto Expedition contact site (Blanton and Snow 2009).

The archeological evidence is convincing that the combination of Nueva Cadiz and Faceted Chevron beads represent pre-1550 Spanish contacts. Consequently, the UWF claim that the three Nueva Cadiz beads and six faceted chevron beads found at site 8Es1 provide evidence of the Luna Colony is highly questionable.

Summary

Three Nueva Cadiz and six Faceted Chevron glass trade beads were found at the alleged Luna Colony site (8Es1) on Pensacola Bay by the University of West Florida. Nueva Cadiz beads consistently date from the first half of the 16th-Century on early Spanish sites in the Caribbean and the mainland of North and South America. The Faceted Chevron beads have a wider date range but are found in combination with Nueva Cadiz beads on early 16th-Century Spanish sites.

The solid placement of the Nueva Cadiz beads from the site in the first half of the 1500s indicates that Spaniard expeditions visited Pensacola Bay prior to the Luna Expedition. Those expeditions could include Pineda (1518), Narvaez (1528), and even unrecorded slaving ships, but the best recorded Spanish expedition to Pensacola Bay prior to the Luna Expedition is the Soto Expedition (Bourne 1904a:97-98; 1904b:21,81; Varner and Varner 1951:384-385).

Beginning in 1539, Spanish ships of the Hernando de Soto Expedition entered Pensacola Bay several times over several years. The Soto expedition consistently reported giving gifts to the Natives of the Southeast. One of those major gifts or trade items were glass beads.

UWF terrestrial archeologists have stated that the three Nueva Cadiz and six Faceted Chevron beads support their claim of the 1559 Luna Colony at the site. Based on glass beads research by archeologists in the Southeast and the Caribbean, the UWF claim is erroneous. UWF may eventually find the needed proof of the Luna Colony location at 8Es1 (numerous structures, burials, refuse pits, and fire hearths), but it appears certain that the Nueva Cadiz glass beads reported by UWF will not be a part of that proof.

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