

# *The Native Tome:* *Another Clue to the Location of* *The Luna Settlement of the Holy Cross (1560)* *and the Soto Battle Site of Mabila (1540)* *in S.W. Alabama*

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October 2018

The first European contact made with the Tome (toe-may) occurred in the summer of 1560. A Spanish scouting group from the Luna Expedition successfully made the journey to the Tome native villages on the Tombigbee River in southwest Alabama. It was an arduous journey rowing up the river in two small vessels, but the scouting group was able to secure some maize from the Natives as well as collect many bushels of acorns (personal communication, David Dodson, 2018). This would be the last time foodstuffs would be bartered with the Natives, for soon thereafter many of the Natives in the region destroyed their fields and left the area to prevent the Spaniards from gaining access to any foodstuffs.

The master of the camp for the Luna Expedition, Jorge Ceron, wrote about the trip, albeit with some half-truths, for the scouting venture did bring back some foodstuffs. It is because of their success that Governor Luna was able to send off another expedition to the Chiefdom of Coosa in northeast Alabama with rations:

*... there remained another hope of relief which the people had, that of the cornfields and grainfields and certain wild vegetables which were found on the banks of this river of Nanipacana (lower Alabama River) and the **Tome** (lower Tombigbee River). Captains Baltazar de Sotelo, Juan de Porras, and Diego Tellez went to these rivers, but returned with all their people dying of hunger, not having found one grain of corn; the cornfields had been pulled up, and all the fields burned and pulled up by the natives, even the wild herbs, which they had learned that we could make use of and which we eat. For this reason the camp has fallen into the want described, and some deaths have occurred from the same cause (Priestley 1928a:155).*

The second mention of the Tome in historic documents occurred in 1692. The Spanish had sent exploratory expeditions by sea from Mexico to reconnoiter Pensacola Bay for a possible settlement location. Included in their intelligence gathering they came across scant information on the Tome and recorded it in a document by “Don Laureano de Torres y Ayala, knight of the order of Santiago and governor of the province of Florida” (Leonard 1967:22). (author’s note: The spelling of the name of this Native group varies and includes: Tome, Tohomes, Thomees, etc. The spelling of the Mabila native group also varies: Mabila, Mauvilla, Maubila, etc.)

*Regarding the Mobiles, I have detailed information to the effect that they are a flourishing and very treacherous tribe; they live on some islands in the middle of the river because of their constant fear of other prosperous tribes, such as the **Tohomes** ... who dwell on the banks of the same river (Tombigbee); lying west-north-west is the great Choctaw empire which all of these tribes respect ... These data are all that I have been able to acquire about this region; I will add, however, that Mobile bay and its river banks are very fertile, and that corn and everything else planted there is abundant (Leonard 1967:221).*

Another mention of the Tome came in 1701. The French were preparing to move their fort in Biloxi to the Mobile River Delta area and sent an exploratory party to the area in the summer of 1700. The group was led by Charles Levasseur under orders from Sauvole, commandant of the fort. The expedition traveled by canoe up the Mobile River and a distance up the lower Tombigbee River. The Tome were encountered on the journey.

*From there (a Mauvilla village), I went to spend an evening with the **Thomees**, who are neighbors and friends of the previous village. They number 300 people. The river divides into three branches at the boundary of their lands, and makes two islands which are very beautiful and deserted in places ... There are two great chiefs which the savages call ougas, and three others called outactas, which are their lieutenants. The skin color of this nation is much darker than that of the Mauvilla. They are very hard-working. The women are very modest and are nearly always covered. They have a kind of apron, which is made of bark from the mulberry tree. It is spun and woven like our heavy cloth, and at the bottom of the apron hangs a fringe which falls toward the knees and then covers them. The women have very beautiful black hair which is surrounded by a swaddling cloth by which a small infant hangs on their back. This makes the women look very curious. In the morning the women cut their husbands' hair nearly level to their shoulders, where it is then stragglingly worn.*

*The **Thomees** have a small lake near their dwellings where they make salt. It is very good. They trade it with the other savages, and even trade it as far as the Chactas (Choctaws) who are a seven day's journal distant by land. It was their intention to go up (north) to this nation by land, but the intense heat had dried the land terribly, which would make it necessary to make a seven day's journey without finding a drop water (Knight and Adams 1981; Levasseur 1700). (Author's note: The low number of people, 300, reported are very likely due to deaths from disease unwittingly brought by the Soto Expedition in 1540. Dobyns 1983; Hill 1983, 2001; Crosby 1972).*

A very brief mention of the River of the Tome is provided in a 1732 document. At the time, the French were lobbying for another fort to be built on the upper Tombigbee River (Ft. Tombecbe). Expeditions were sent out to reconnoiter the region. The document was written and sent from a Chicasaw town on the upper Tombigbee River.

*... one could go and come easily by the river of the Chicasaws which flows into that of the **Tohomes** (lower Tombigbee River) and ends at Mobile (Roland and Sanders 1927:163).*

Secondary sources can also be useful in gleaning information concerning the Tome. Writers such as Hamilton (1976 from 1910 original), Swanton (1979 reprint from 1946 original), Ball (1978 reprint from 1882 original), Higginbotham (1966, 1977) contributed to our knowledge of the Tome.

*... the river of the **Tome**, which appears in the De Luna documents, and was evidently the Tombigbee, shows that by 1560 they were near, if not actually at, the spot where the French discovered them 140 years later. (Swanton 1946:196).*

*The **Thomez** were eight leagues above the fort (French Fort at 27-mile Bluff), and we may fairly place this tribe about McIntosh's Bluff on the Tombigbee (Hamilton 1910:106).*

The reference to the Tome collecting salt from their territory and trading it with other Native groups is a clue to their cultural practices and geographic location. There are rare salt spring deposits on the lower Tombigbee River in Clarke and Washington Counties. They are the only such deposits in Alabama. The salt springs were recorded by historians during the days of the Civil War when this area was a major supplier of salt to the Confederacy. The salt springs are located in a specific area of southwestern Clarke County and eastern Washington County (Brown 1980, 2004; Curren 1982:95; Eubanks and Brown 2015; Ball 1978).

*The salt springs and wells of the county are important in considering the geology as well as the resources of Clarke. These, and also sulphur springs, were discovered by McFarland through some Indian traditions (Ball 1978:645, reprint of 1882 original).*

## Conclusions

The Tome are a clue to discovering the location of the battle site of Mabila and the Settlement of the Holy Cross. Mabila is the site of the largest battle ever fought between Europeans and Native peoples on American soil (likely located between the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers in southern Clarke County). The site of the Settlement of the Holy Cross is the first long-term European settlement in the interior of the current United States (likely located on the east side of the Alabama River in northern Baldwin County). As described previously, a Spanish expeditionary force from their settlement on the lower Alabama River visited the Tome on the Tombigbee River in 1559-1560.

The 1540 Soto army did not mention the Tome, however, we have a clue that the Mabila battle site was located relatively close to the 1559-1560 inland Luna settlement. The clue was provided by the local natives at the Holy Cross Settlement. The Spanish learned from them that Spaniards previously destroyed some of the houses in their town (author's note: The Holy Cross Settlement was established in a Native village named Nanipacana.).

*(Nanipacana) had been famous not only for the number of people but also for its sumptuous edifices according to the custom of the land and the Spaniards who had come there at other times left it as it was (partially destroyed).* (Padilla 1596:28, translation by Childers and Dodson ... author's note: The "edifices" were very likely traditional earthen mounds of the Mississippian Period, many with structures of Native leaders atop them.)

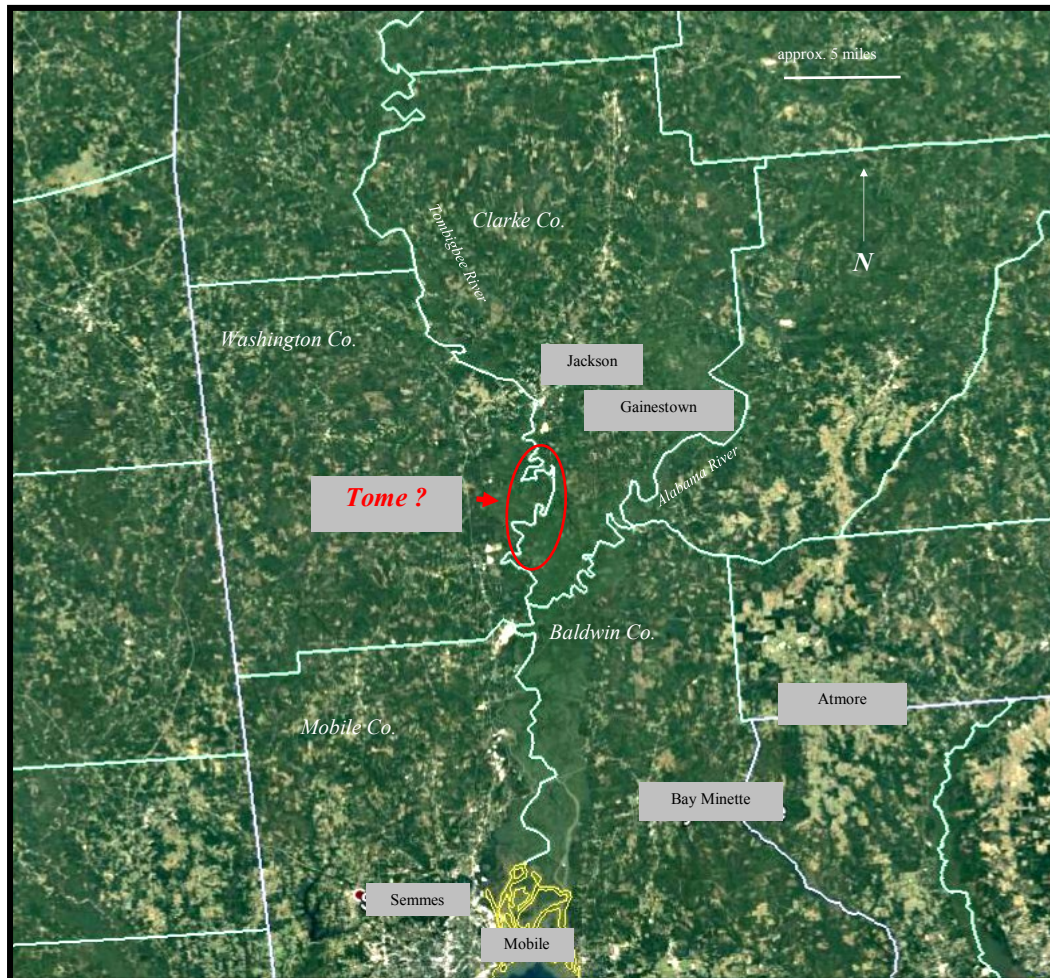
The Soto army reported that they burned Native towns in the vicinity of Mabila for a month after the battle. *After the end of the battle ... they burned over much of the country.* (Bourne 1904b:128). Does this mean that the Soto army burned structures in Nanipacana as they did in other native towns after the battle of Mabila? We are not yet sure but archeological excavations of the town site might provide answers.

The hypothesis of the location of Mabila and the Holy Cross Settlement using the Tome clue can be summarized. The Tome lived on the lower Tombigbee River. The Holy Cross Settlement was located on the east side of the lower Alabama River. Spaniards from the settlement went to the Tome villages relatively near the settlement. The Spaniards from the Mabila battle site burned some of the Native town that later became the Holy Cross Settlement. The location of the Tome on the lower Tombigbee River provides a clue that Mabila and the Holy Cross Settlement are located in the region near the junction of the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers.

The archeological record supports this hypothesis. An impressive array of Native sites dating to the time of the Soto and Luna expeditions (late Mississippian Period) exists on the lower Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers in the region of the junction of the rivers while very few sites of the period are present in the hill country to the north (Physiographic subdivisions: Southern Red Hills, Buhrstone Hills, Lime Hills, Hatchetigbee Dome) (Brose, Jenkins, and Weisman 1983:122; Curren 1992; Geological Survey of Alabama 2018).

A concentration of Spanish artifacts dating from the 1500s is also present in the junction area (Curren 1986a-b, 1987, 1992, 2013, 2016, 2018, 1992; Curren and Lloyd 1987; Curren and McKenzie 1988; Fuller, Silvia, and Stowe 1984; Finlay 1991; Brown 2002; Cottier and Sheldon 1985; Moore 1899; Little and Curren 1990; Jenkins and Paglione 1980; Holmes Jr. 1993; Holmes n.d.; Curren and Majors 1984; Curren, Little, and Holstein 1989; Dodson 2017, 2018, n.d.).

We are currently field testing the hypothesis.



*Hypothesized Location  
of the Tome*

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