

Luis, Don de Velasco ^[1]

Luis, Don de Velasco

by L. A. Vigneras

fl. 1561–71

Don de Velasco Luis, Indian chieftain, was the brother of the cacique of Ajacan, located inside Chesapeake Bay ^[2] between the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth parallels. As a boy, he was picked up by Spaniards, probably Dominicans ^[3] who had been in Florida ^[4] with Villafañe in 1561, and taken to Mexico City ^[5]. There he was baptized and given the name of his godfather, the viceroy Don Luis de Velasco. In 1566, having driven the French out of Florida ^[4] and wishing to gain a foothold in the Baya de Santa Maria region (Chesapeake-North Carolina sounds), Pedro Menéndez de Avilés decided to send Don Luis back to his native land with an escort of two Dominicans, three officials, and fifteen soldiers.

The expedition sailed from San Mateo on 2 August aboard the patache *Trinidad*, commanded by Domingo Fernández. By 14 August they sighted land at 37°30' north latitude, outside Chesapeake Bay ^[2], but could not disembark because of bad weather. Driven south, they again struck land on 24 August at 36° north latitude and entered a "river," which must have been Albemarle Sound ^[6] or Currituck Sound ^[7]. The military commander of the expedition, Captain Pedro de Coronas, christened the river San Bartolomé and solemnly took possession of it in the name of the king of Spain, but Don Luis did not recognize it as Ajacan, the land of his forefathers. During the next two days the party explored one bank and then the other, but still Don Luis failed to find any familiar landmarks. On the twenty-seventh, realizing that the Rio de San Bartolomé was not Ajacan, the explorers agreed to return to their first landfall (37°30' north latitude) but were again prevented from landing when a hurricane blew them out to sea. The storm raged for several days, and, giving up their mission, they sailed across the Atlantic and reached Cádiz, Spain ^[8], on 23 Oct. 1566. Don Luis was taken to the court by the two Dominicans ^[3].

Four years later, Pedro Menéndez took Don Luis back to Florida ^[9] and once more sent him to search for his homeland with nine Jesuit missionaries but without a military escort. This time the young Indian chieftain successfully reached Ajacan, situated inside Chesapeake Bay ^[10] between the James and the York rivers, on 10 Sept. 1570. A few days later, however, Don Luis deserted the missionaries and went to live with his kinsfolk, adopting their customs and even practicing polygamy. Apparently angered by the criticism of the Jesuits ^[11], he killed three of them on 4 Feb. 1571. The others were murdered a few days later and the mission was destroyed.

References:

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Records of Diego de Camargo, Secretary of the 1566 Expedition (Archiva General de Indias ^[12], Seville)
L. A. Vigneras, "A Spanish Discovery of North Carolina in 1566," *North Carolina Historical Review* 46 (1969).

Subjects:

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Authors:

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