THE CALOOSA CULTURE OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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FOREWARD

Interpreting the life styles of the Caloosa Indians is a difficult task as they did not write and were only discovered in their late society by the European explorers who reported their contacts in a biased manner. Most written records were by learned priests who tended to look through jaundiced eyes at the pagan savages.

Only artifacts and old Spanish records remain. Although one can learn much from artifacts, much remains to conjecture due to simple guesswork upon the assimilation of artifactual data. Spanish records were written in their vernacular and many documents remain today in the library in Madrid, Spain. Some documents have been translated into English but are found only in the larger libraries.

Due to this, secondary sources of information have been utilized, obtained from local libraries. Also used are what few Spanish translations were available.

A book of paintings by the French artist LeMoyne, show some very good examples of the life style of the early Florida Indians. Although the paintings tend to represent a theme of realism, they are mostly of the Northeastern Florida tribes. For the most part, however, generally one tribe did not differ culturally from another, except for religious and assimilated minor beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

The Caloosa culture was possibly at its height when the Spanish and French first landed on the peninsula of Pascua de Florida in the fifteenth century.

The Caloosa have been traced back to 2,100 BC using carbon fourteen tests on Marco Island artifacts.

Whether or not these early inhabitants were the Caloosa Nation is undefinable. Possibly they were a matriculation of groups from the Yucutan area of Mexico or whose ancestors had come across the Bering land-bridge and had assembled into a distinct culture. Usually in primitive societies this meant the emergence of a strong man who became their leader. Agreements were reached by his dictates and later by his appointed sub leaders. Thus a social class emerged. A social stratification system became evident and laws, beliefs, and agreements as to their roles were enacted. This process of institutionalization brought together a society such as the Caloosa.

There were several different cultures of the early Florida inhabitants, be they Caloosa or early man.

The Weeden Island Culture appears to mark one of the transitional points from the Woodland Tradition to the Mississipian Period and from the Burial Mound II Period into the Temple Mound I Period.

These early inhabitants who occupied a four hundred mile stretch of the Florida Gulf Coast were round-headed people who practiced skull deformation and lived in small villages on the coast and fifty miles inland along the rivers.[1]

Gordon Willey infers throughout his text that the mound builders, especially the Weeden Island I and II, plus the Safety Harbor Cultures were built before the Caloosa had become established as a culture.

The archaeologist, H. F. Cushing, who did his excavations in Southwest Florida around the turn of the century tended to believe that the widespread finds of Caloosa artifacts proved they were empire builders.

After the Europeans explorers had long since given up their search for gold and returned to the old countires, Cushing believed the Caloosa were yet still expanding due to the many younger finds of trade goods and artifacts.

The Caloosa had a distinct culture with many towns in Southwest Florida but moved away from the white man only to fade into oblivion in the seventeenth century.

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1. Robert Silverberg, Mound Builders of Ancient America (Greenwich, Conn. New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1968), p. 297

ARRIVAL OF THE CALOOSAS

Florida was one of the last areas of land in the continental United States to become land mass. This came about approximately ten thousand or more years ago. The first inhabitants were probably remnants of stone age peoples who had come from Asia across the area called the Bering land-bridge to Alaska. Eventually they worked their way southward to the continental Americas and some to the peninsula of Florida.

Frank H. Cushing states in a paper he read before the American Philisophical Society on November 6, 1896, "There is no question in the author's mind but that there is a decided correspondence between the arts of the Caloosa and those of the ancient Yucatecans." Rolfe Schell also agrees with the wind currents that flow past the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico toward the Southwest Florida coast. He feels also that these currents have been condusive for habitation from that area.[1]

Trade was evident as a jade necklace found near St. Augustine was found to be of Mayan origin. Possibly these Florida peoples were of the Central American stock.[2]

Palaentologists theorize that ancient man entered the Americas by either means about 40,000 years ago.[3]

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1. Rolfe F. Schell, 1,000 Years On Mound Key (Ft. Myers Beach, Florida: Island Press, 1968), p. 8

2. Christina Wescott, "The Puzzle From the Past," Lee Living, May, 1980, p. 9-11

3. Ibid. p. 9-11

Man has been on the earth for only a second in the year of time. Proconsul Man lived 25 million years ago. Next came Zinjanthropus Man some 23 million years later. This would roughly cover the Miocene Period. Zinjanthropus Man could not speak because his narrow jaws did not allow any free tongue movement. Approximately 2 million years ago, Homo Habilis arrived. He could speak and developed some useful habits. Then came Homo Sapiens, the Calcoosa.[4]

The earliest traces of the Calcoosa were found on Marco Island. Cushing discovered the largest find of Calcoosa artifacts known, in 1896. Preserved in the muck were tools, weapons, and beautiful carved artwork. Carbon fourteen tests on wood charcoal established human habitation from about 1450 to 1140 BC. Pieces of pottery were found dating back to 2100 BC.[5]

John M. Goggin, a Florida archaeologist, dates the major shell constructions of the Calcoosa to the period from 500 to 1,000 AD. He estimates the height of Calcoosa civilization between 850 to 1000 AD.[6] DeSoto's scribe wrote that a shipwrecked survivor who had lived for some time with the Indians claimed they were still expanding their empire and engaged in mound building, although it may have been more of a mound maintenance program.

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4. Charles E. Bennett, Settlement of Florida (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968) pp. 1-25

5. Westcott, pp. 9-11

6. John M. Goggin, Indian and Spanish Selected Writings (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1964) pp. 12-29

Carlton Tebeau, in his History of Florida mentions six major tribes existing in Florida just prior to European discovery. The count was probably done by Europeans or given to them by the Indians. The tribes were, the Timucuans who numbered 14,300 and lived from the Tampa area northeast to the Jacksonville area; the Calcosa numbering 2,375 including 550 Mayaimi in the Lake Okeechobee region; the Ais and Jeaga who lived on the East Coast near West Palm Beach and numbered 800; the Apalachee with 688 including 500 Chatot, 800 Apalachicola, and 300 Pensacola who were mostly farmers of North Florida; and around the Miami area, 800 Tequesta.

LOCATION OF THE EMPIRE

By the time Cushing had excavated most of his areas, he had counted 75 shell mounds scattered throughout Southwest Florida, mostly between Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River. Many more mounds were found south to Marco Island but were not included in his count.[1]

Lopez de Velasco, a Spanish explorer, described the kingdom of Carlos as "Escampaba" situated at 26½ degrees latitude. The old Spanish charts were erroneous but the 26½ degree fix allows for a margin of error in their calculations. This area falls around the Fort Myers Beach/Mound Key area. Velasco believed that the center of the Calcosa empire, their main city was at Mound Key or nearby. He described further; that the island kingdom was one half league in circumference, only 20% off the actual area of Mound Key. Also Estero Pass or Estero Island was mentioned. A captive Spanish Priest named Rogel tells of being moved by Carlos (the chief ?) to "another island" implying that they were already on an island in the first place. The only available nearby refuge was possibly Fort Myers Beach or Estero Island. Mound Key also fits all the requirements of the Spanish narratives, especially those authorized by Solis-de-Meras, Parrientos, and Father Rogel.[2]

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1. Christina Westcott, "The Puzzle From the Past", Lee Living, May 1980, pp. 9-11

2. Clifford M. Lewis, "The Calusa", Tachale, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), and Mound Key, pp. 1-3

Mound Key diggings show pottery in abundance; Glades Plain and Glades Red. Other artifacts include animal and human bones, a pendant, and a granite implement of some kind.

Menendez, the explorer, claimed that he had established a fort on an island in the vicinity of this area and had emplaced some cannon there. Thirty-six cabins and a place for mass was inside a walled enclosure. Carlos evacuated the island about 1570. Some Spanish ornaments were found at Mound Key per Mrs. Johnson, the wife of an early local settler, and also by E. E. Damkohler, another domesticate.[3]

From the many diggings it is assumed that the Empire included Chokoloskee and Marco Islands, Caxambas, the Goodland area, Naples, Mound Key, the Pine Island Sound area, and the Charlotte Harbor area.

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3. Lewis, Tacachale, pp. 28-29

THE CALOOSA

The names or words Calos, Callos, Carlos, or Calusa were heterogeneal contractions by the Spanish and had several meanings. In Choctaw, Calcosa meant fierce, brave, or cruel. There may have been an inference that they may have had dealings with the Choctaw Nation or were themselves from Southeastern North American homogenety. No relation however, has been found linking these tribes nor the mound builders of Etowah, Georgia, or the Hopewell Culture of Ohio.[1] Calusa was taken as the tribe of culture, Calos was their principal town, and Carlos was the prominent chief.[2]

They were a tall race, possibly six to seven feet tall, much unlike the shorter tribes of the more northernly areas of the United States. Excavations of burial mounds have turned up several human bones which would validate their size. Also, Spanish accounts tell of a very tall race. In the town called Tekanto, an unearthed grave yielded a shinbone measuring more than thirty-three inches. This was reported by Landa in 1566. Also a skull was found weighing 1½ pounds.[3]

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1. Christina Westcott, "The Puzzle From The Past," Lee Living, May 1980 pp. 9-11

2. Clifford M. Lewis, "The Calusa," Tacachale, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), p. 19

3. Rolfe Schell, 1000 Years on Mound Key, (Ft. Myers Beach: Island Press, 1962), p. 10

Laudonniere described the recovery of two Spanish captives whose "hair hung down to their thighs in Indian fashion." The Caloosa were also fond of elaborate body painting and tatooing. Old accounts relate that the chiefs and their wives ornamented their skins with punctures arranged to make various designs, a practice that possibly made them ill for several days. The punctures were rubbed with certain herbs which left indelible colors.[4]

Caloosa men wore their hair about one and a half feet long tied into a topknot, with a fringe of bangs around the face. The women wore skirts of Spanish Moss, made so fine in texture that the Spanish mistakenly took it for silk.[5] Caloosa men wore simple breechcloths during the summer and deerskin garments in winter or on cooler days.[6] The Caloosa did not differ much from the Spanish but for facial hair, size, and dress. The Indians liked to touch the skin of the Europeans as they found it softer and more tender than theirs. Also, the Indians liked to touch the European garments which were new to them.[7]

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4. Byron D. Voeglin, South Florida's Vanished People, (Ft. Myers Beach: Island Press, 1977) p. 9

5. Ibid.

6. Westcott

7. Fred B. Perkins, Narratives of LeMoyne and DeBry, (translated-Boston, 1875), pp. 1-80

Calcoosa personal ornaments included large labrets of wood for their lower lips, which were inserted into small holes. Lip-pins, ear buttons, plates, spikes, and plugs were also used. Most of the ornaments were made of shells and wood. Animal bone and coral stone were also used. They wore tassels, constructed from the dyed cotton tree.[8]

As was the case with North American Tribes, they probably smeared themselves with animal fat to prevent the ever-present bites and stings of the many insects found in this area.

Despite these difficulties and the threat of hurricanes, they persevered and dwelled in the land.

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8. Frank Hamilton Cushing, Key Dwellers Remains on the Florida Gulf Coast, (N.Y.: AMS Press, 1973), pp. 374-378

CALOOSA TOWNS

Caloosa villages or towns were generally along the Gulf Coast or along the navigatable rivers that flow toward the Gulf.

The LeMoyne painting shows a village that is circular, using timbers for a tall parapet. Only one entrance was used and only two people walking abreast could enter at one time. These representative paintings tend to show a somewhat realistic idea of the subject, but focus on tribes other than the Caloosa.

Generally the Caloosa lived around large shell mounds that had become solidified by time. Many of these mounds were quite large in circumference and relatively tall. At the tops of the domicilary* mounds, they built their huts of timber and wattle, possibly finished by a coating of clay and ash cement. The largest mound was a flat-topped pyramid where the temple was erected. The temple was used for diety worship and will be enhanced in the section on religion. The erection of these mounds and their structures took the dedication of several generations of Indians, most likely singing and chanting while laboring, carrying their shells in woven baskets.[1]

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* residence area

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1. Christina Westcott, "The Puzzle From The Past". Lee Living, May 1980, pp. 9-11

The shells were found in abundance along the coast and included conchs, oysters, and a myriad of others.

To gain access to the houses atop the mounds, Carcilaso relates, "The Indians built two, three, or more streets, according to the number that are necessary, straight up the side of the hill. The streets are fifteen or twenty feet in width and are bordered with walls constructed of thick pieces of wood that are thrust side by side into the earth to a depth of more than the height of a man. Additional pieces of wood just as thick are laid across and joined one to the other to form steps, and they are worked on all four sides so as to provide a smoother ascent.... All of the rest of the hill is cut like a wall, so it cannot be ascended except by the stairs, for in this way they are better able to defend the houses of the Lord".[2]

The villagers also lived around the mounds, sometimes in walled areas, but mostly in the open in simple huts of wattle or daub with palm thatched roofs. Most were grouped in villages but some lived in groups or singly near rivers. Some huts were built on pilings.[3] None of the pilings found by Cushing in his excavations exceeded six and one half feet in length.

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2. Robert Silverberg, Mound Builders of Ancient America, (Greenwich, Conn.: N.Y. Graphic Society, 1968), pp. 12-13

3. Byron D. Voeglin, South Florida's Vanished People, (Ft. Myers Beach: Island Press, 1977), p. 10

Most of the pilings were three and one half feet or less, built of palmetto wood. They were drilled with large holes for the placement of horizontal timbers made from various local sapplings.[4]

A village was described in the narratives of DeSoto as being "two leagues" from their base camp. It is the general consensus of opinion that DeSoto landed around Tampa Bay. Some feel he may have landed along the Caloosahatchee River. Whatever the opinion, DeSoto "found the village deserted. It consisted of several large houses, built of wood and thatched with palm leaves. At one end stood a kind of temple with the image of a bird on top, made of wood, with guilded eyes".[5]

Seventy-five shell mounds were found in this general area by Cushing, plus some stilt house remains but no village sites.

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4. Frank Hamilton Cushing, Key Dwellers Remains on the Florida Gulf Coast, (N.Y. : AMS Press, 1973), p. 362

5. Theodore Irving, Conquest of Florida by Hernando DeSoto, (N.Y.: Putnam and Son, 1971), p. 58

CARLOS AND RELIGION

The Calooса high chiefs carried substantial secular as well as religious authority, organizing and controlling the millions of man hours of labor needed for building their huge projects. Some chiefs also functioned as priest-kings.[1]

Another LeMoyne painting depicting a priest or shaman dislocating his shoulders and making terrifying facial expressions is indicative of the reality and seriousness with which they approbated their religion. The painting depicts the shaman kneeling on the ground, dislocating his joints, and mumbling incantations against some enemy.[2]

The priests used skulls, bones, crab claws, shells, rattles made from the joined shells of the gopher tortoise, and lancets of fish bones in their practices. Whether the lancets were used for blood letting or opening sores is not known. Gords and shells were used for their black drink.

The black drink was made by using the leaves of the casseena* which produced a drunken stupor.[3]

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* This vegetation is unidentifiable

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1. Byron D. Voegelin, South Florida's Vanished People, (Ft. Myers Beach: Island Press, 1977), pp. 12-13

2. Fred B. Perkins, Narrative of LeMoyne & DeBry, (Boston: 1875) translation, pp. 1-80

3. Frank H. Cushing, Key Dwellers Remains on the Florida Gulf Coast, (N.Y. : AMS Press, 1973), pp. 394-400

The Calcosa showed little interest in Christian Doctrine. If they became baptized, it was only a token gesture. The shaman, however, usually prevented baptizing among the tribes.[4]

One of the Calcosa beliefs was that each man had three souls. One was the pupil of the eye, another was the shadow that each one makes, and the third was the image one saw in a mirror or in a clear pool of water. When a man died, they said that two souls left the body. The third soul which was the pupil of the eye remained in the body and thus they were able to speak with the dead of the cemetery, asking them for advice.[5]

Because of a superstitious fear of the dead the burial mounds were located some distance from the villages and were continually guarded.[6]

The narratives of DeBry explain that the dead chiefs were cremated in the center of the village and buried there with several of their belongings. The priests were burned in their huts with their belongings. Again, these were probably Timucuans and their religious practices differed from those of the Calcosa.

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4. Clifford M. Lewis, "The Calusa," Tacachale, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), pp. 22-25

5. Ibid.

6. Christina Westcott, "The Puzzle From the Past," Lee Living, (Ft. Myers, May, 1980), pp. 9-11

With some Caloosa, the bodies of the dead were deposited in wooden boxes, covered with boards without any fastening except a stone or log laid upon the top. Because of this many bodies were carried off by wild animals.[7] Most Caloosa however, buried their dead in the large burial mounds.

Several burial mounds have been found to have had several layers of bodies, probably buried at different times. Gordon Willey states in his text that there seemed to be "common burials in mass along with singular burials." Possibly the mass burials were a result of European spread epidemics or the result of warfare.

King Carlos, the supreme of the Caloosa Empire, was reported to be the largest and handsomest of all the Indians of the area. He was an energetic and powerful ruler. He was a priest-king.[8]

Two customs prevailed to the high priests. Firstly, the high chief or priest was obliged to marry his sister. Legend tells of Carlos marrying his mother and sending his father packing. Second, when the high priest or priest-king died, retainers were sacrificed. When the chief's children or other members of the elite died, the village sacrificed children.[9] This is also pointed out by DeBry in a LaMoyne painting.

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7. Theodore Irving, Conquest of Florida by Hernando DeSoto, (N.Y.: Putnam & Son, 1971), p. 46

8. Charles E. Bennett, Settlement of Florida, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968), pp. 10-20

9. Voegelin, p. 13

Laudonniere described the religious role by Carlos (Calos) as one of great reverence by his subjects, since he had convinced them it was his magic incantations that caused the earth to provide them with the necessities of life. To maintain this belief he shut himself up with two or three confidential companions in a certain building. There he performed his incantations, and anyone who tried to spy on the partakings inside the hut was immediately put to death.[10]

Father Rogel referred to a "house of Idols" in which the Caloosa kept hideous masks which were their idols. To gain admittance to this house, a certain ceremonial dress was required.[11]

In most North American tribes women and outsiders were not allowed into the ceremonies. Rogel wrote that he tried to gain admittance but was repulsed.

Masks and figureheads of animals were used for religious purposes and were made of wood. Several of these are in American museums and a copy of one is in the Collier County Museum. Masks that were human-like were possibly used for the change of seasons and the worship thereof.[12]

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10. Lewis, p. 23

11. Clifford M. Lewis, S. J., Mound Key, The Spanish Jesuit Mission of 1567-69 in S. W. Florida, (Research paper-no date), p. 6

12. Cushing, pp. 388-394

The masks of idols were used in ceremonies at their temples. There were processions, singing, and costumes.[13]

The women of King Carlos' tribe, when they met to dance, wore, hanging at their waist, flat plates of gold as large as quoits* that were so heavy they inconvenienced and fatigued the wearer. The men were similarily adorned.[14]

Women did have a dignified role in the tribe. Carlos' chief lady, probably a wench, was given a seat of honor on ceremonial or official occasions and she had attendants. She ran the risk, however, of being cast aside for a more comely and younger sycophant. Carlos was reported to have had several wives.[15]

Carlos had a large store of gold and silver taken from the Spanish shipwrecks which he had been given in tribute, and used in his ceremonies.

Chiefs of the villages under Carlos' domination paid tribute to his by bringing exotic feathers, mats, deerskins, food and precious metals.[16]

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* quoits - A flat piece of stone or metal thrown as a test of strength and skill.

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13. Lewis, Tacachale, pp. 23-25

14. Perkins, pp. 1-80

15. Lewis, Tacachale, p. 32

16. Frederick W. Hodge, Spanish Explorers in the Southern United States 1528-1543, (N. Y. : Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 76

Carlos had some difficulty with the lesser caciques or chiefs in his tribute collection and at times became quite belligerent toward them. He was reported to have hated the Tequesta and was constantly assimilating their areas under his domination.[17]

Although a few Caloosas accepted Christianity it was at most a token sop to the Spanish priests.

Lewis states that the Indian men would take white wives but that Indian women never wed a white man because it was considered disloyal to the chief. He further states that the Indian women would inform the Spanish of impending attacks by their tribes, thus the attacks were nipped in the bud.[18] This statement seems to conflict and there were documents written that proved that there was equal coinhabitation by both genders.

European introduced diseases, warfare, and slavery drastically reduced the number of Indians. After the Europeans ceased their interest in Florida, the Caloosa empire decayed. The invasion of the Seminoles in the sixteenth century may have absorbed some remaining Caloosas, but there is no proof of this. Some "Spanish Indians" participated on the attack of Henry Perrine during the Seminole wars in the 1840's.

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17. Charles Andrews, Jonathan Dickinson's Journal, (Yale University Press, 1945), edited, pp. 146-147

18. Lewis, Tacachale, pp. 146-147

CONFLICT

The Calcosa were a fierce, brave, and independent people. They were artistic and builders of an empire. Yet they were capable of severing an enemy's limbs and dismemberment. Scalping was common and they were displayed on tall poles in their villages amid dancing and revelry.

Supposedly a chief or cacique named Hirrehigua who lived near the Orange River in Eastern Lee County was reported to have entertained himself by roasting his captives alive.[1]

At harvest time Laudonniere says Carlos would sacrifice a victim from among several shipwrecked Spaniards who were his prisoners.[2]

Juan Ponce de Leon was attacked by the Calcosa somewhere between Estero Bay and Charlotte Harbor in 1549. The Dominican Fray Luis Cancer and three of his associated were killed almost as soon as they set foot on the shore.[3]

It is conjecture to determine the landing site of DeSoto. Most feel it was near Tampa Bay, but Voegelin and others believe it may have been along the Caloosahatchee River.

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1. Theodore Irving, Conquest of Florida by Hernando DeSoto, (N. Y.: Putnam and Son, 1971), pp.51-70

2. Clifford M. Lewis, "The Calusa," Tacachale, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), pp. 22-28

3. Ibid. pp. 20-23

Continuing, DeSoto "was attacked at the dawn of the day. An immense number of savages broke upon DeSoto's men with deafening yells." Several of the Spaniards were wounded with arrows and the others ran to the beaches and the fleet at anchor.[4]

A Spanish captive, a victim of an earlier shipwreck, Juan Ortiz, 18, was liberated by DeSoto and described his anecdote. He was employed in bringing wood and water to the village. He was allowed little sleep and received little food. He was beaten daily. On festivals he was made to run, to the "barbarous amusement" of the Indians. He ran from sunrise to sunset in the village where his companions had earlier met their deaths. Indians were stationed with bows and arrows to shoot him if he faltered or stopped running. The daughters of the chief, however, would slip him food at night to keep him alive. At one time he claimed that he was to be roasted alive but his painful shrieks caused the women to plead with the cacique for his life.[5]

Although the Caloosa were said to have used bows, few have been found in excavations. They used clubs imbedded with sharks teeth, criss-crossed with sinew to hold the teeth to the wood. Also used were wooden war clubs with flat blades.

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4. Irving, p. 57

5. Ibid., pp. 63-67

Dirks and stilettos were made from the fore leg bones of deer. A lance or arrow was thrown by means of a cup-like wooden scoop and called an atlatl. The lances were about four feet long and tipped with fire hardened wood or thorns.[6]

The Calcosa would raid other villages and make captives and/or allies of the area. One such ally, a King Cathkaqua, had a daughter that Carlos married. Usually the Indians would ambush other villages and carry off their women. The Calcosa thought this was a splendid practice. They were accustomed to marry virgins whom they took in these raids, and were said to be excessively in love with them.[7]

Villages were guarded by selected warriors who, the Spanish claimed, could smell their enemy nearby. A guard who fell asleep while on duty was taken to the village center and in a public display, hit in the head with a flat bladed war club which nearly cracked his skull open.[8] Undoubtedly, some probably were slain and others could have become mentally deficient.

Prior to attacking the enemy or his village, the chief would perform his religious incantations and consult with his sorcerer.

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6. Frank H. Cushing, Key Dwellers Remains on the Florida Gulf Coast. (N. Y. : AMS Press, 1973), pp. 360-380

7. Fred B. Perkins, Narrative of LeMoyne & DeDry, (Boston: 1875), translation, pp. 1-80

8. Ibid.

Thusly, he would lead his men into battle. The dead were mourned by their wives who wailed and begged the chief for revenge which he usually acceded.[9]

During the DeSoto expedition, Indians would come into the Spanish encampment and sometimes one would hit a Spaniard on the back and run into the woods. The Indians did not want to kill there, but to lure them singly into the woods to do combat. If the Spaniard could not catch him or find him, it was considered a victory in Indian warfare.[10]

Warfare and cruelty may have seemed to be a way of life among the Calcosa but daily living profluenced.

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9. Ibid.

10. Frederick W. Hodge, Spanish Explorers in the Southern United States 1528-1543, (N. Y. : Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 102

PROFICIENCY

The Caloosa spent a great deal of their time hunting, fishing, building, dancing, and warring.

Painted deerskins and weapons made from deer bones proved they did hunt to some extent and also traded.

Mostly the Caloosa were fishermen who worked the bays and beaches along the Gulf Coast where the majority of their villages lay. From the conch shell they fashioned drinking cups, hammers, picks, and weapons. A hole was bored through the shell at the large end and a wooden handle was inserted.[1] Other digging and cutting tools were constructed of wood lined with sharks teeth. They were bound together with sinew, fishgut, or rawhide. Some of these types of artifacts had a sticky residence, red in color used as a base cement. It could have been rubber-gum, rosin, beeswax, or a combination of these.[2]

There were remnants of small gardens, possibly muck gardens, although the Caloosa were never considered agronomists. Maize was grown, roasted, and sometimes ground into flour.

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1. Fred B. Perkins, Narrative of LeMoyne & DeBry, (Boston: 1875), translation. pp. 1-80

2. Frank B. Cushing, Key Dwellers Remains on the Florida Gulf Coast, (N. Y.: AMS Press, 1973), pp. 367-374

Smoked lizards also constituted part of their diet. Besides maize, another excellent source of flour was coontie root.[3] DeBry relates that the quality of flour made from this root made the "most excellent bread." It furnished a rather large area of the Caloosa Empire for fifteen miles around their main city. DeBry said the inhabitants of this Island City gained great wealth from their neighbors by selling the roots at a high price.[4]

Fishing and shelling provided the mainstay of their diets. The estuaries provided their fish, oysters, scallops, and conches. Fish hooks were made from pieces of forked hardwood. Hooks were three inches long and were made from forked twigs. The barb on the hook was constructed of deer bone. Most of their fishing was done with nets made of loose material that could be weaved. Fishing basins were often built, such as the one at Mound Key. The Caloosa had learned from the porpoise how to drive fish into the basins and there they were trapped when the tide went out.[5]

Personal furniture was constructed of wood. Their seats were like antillean stools. Flat slabs of wood from one to more than two feet in length made the seat itself.

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3. Charles E. Bennett, Settlement of Florida, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968), pp. 1-25

4. Perkins.

5. Bennett, pp. 1-25

They were slightly hollowed on top from end to end as well as from side to side with rounded bottoms. Prong-like pairs of legs were put into notches or holes on the ends, usually two to three inches long.[6]

Household rugs were made from shredded bark in thin strips that were very closely platted.[7]

Their pillows were taperingly cylindrical, made of fine rushes, and showed a continuous four plait, so they were compressible and flexible, yet springy. They were filled with Spanish moss or deer hair.[8]

Cups, bowls, trays, and mortars were constructed from wood. Ladles were made from the greater halves of hollowed-out conch shells.[9]

Children's toys were also found. Several toy canoes were found in burial mounds. They were not well finished. They were flat-bottomed, with square ends. Like the large canoes, they were for the navigation of shallow streams, inlets, and canals.

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6. Cushing, p. 363

7. Ibid., pp. 363-364

8. Ibid., pp. 363-368

9. Ibid., p. 364

Jonathan Dickinson reported seeing canoes lashed together in catamaran fashion and sails were used. Therefore, to travel great distances were possible, even across the Gulf.[10]

There is no evidence of dolls found in this research. Possibly a doll would have conflicted with the many totems and masks used in their worship.

The Caloosa did not seem to be a mobile people such as the Plains Indians of the central part of the United States. Thus, they constructed their mounds, furniture, and other gear to withstand the test of time.

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10. Ibid., pp. 367-374

SUMMARY

The Caloosa Empire had vanished by the end of the seventeenth century. Only artifacts and few written documents by learned Europeans remain to be studied.

Many of the areas of mounds have been excavated but yet there is still a great deal of knowledge that has vanished with them, never to be known.

Spanish youngsters were put into the Caloosa villages to learn their tongue, but the Indians possibly did not relate to them in any detail as no narrative of this exists. A great many of the Indian women that were espoused to Spaniards during the decline of their empire were of little or no help because most of the Europeans did not read or write.

The Caloosa were artistic, yet cruel. They, at first, welcomed the European invaders, but after mistreatment began to take a foul view of them and became belligerent. The Spanish enslaved, killed many, and also caused widespread epidemics of diseases.

It is much the same old tale of the American Indian. Being an organic and childlike people, they were subjugated.

An old Cheyenne saying tells us, "ONLY THE ROCKS LIVE FOREVER."

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