
The Peoples of America

The Timucua

Jerald T. Milanich



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Preface

Name, nationality, and ethnic affiliation: Juan Alonso Cabale, Spanish, Timucua Indian.

Religious preference: Roman Catholic.

Date and place of birth: 1709, mission Nuestra Señora de la Leche, Florida.

Date and place of death: November 14, 1767, Guanabacoa, Cuba.

Wife's name, nationality, and ethnic affiliation: María Rosa Tuslipalea, Spanish, Yamasee Indian.

Children: Juan and Francisco, born about 1741 and 1742 in Florida.

Taken at face value, these biographical facts provide only a thumbnail sketch about a native American Indian who lived in Spanish Florida and died in Cuba more than two and a half centuries ago. But if we look behind these few particulars from one person's life, we will find an incredible story. Juan Alonzo Cabale, who died in a land far from his birthplace and the home of his ancestors, was the last of his people, the last survivor of perhaps as many as 200,000 Timucua-speaking Indians who once had lived in northern peninsula Florida and southern Georgia.

Almost nothing is known about the life of Juan Alonso Cabale beyond these facts derived from three historical documents: a census list in a Spanish archive; a parish registry from the church of Nuestra Señora Ascunción in Cuba; and the minutes of the *cabildo*, the town council, of Guanabacoa, Cuba. Even so, these

scanty details reflect the colonial period history of the Timucua Indians and the cultural changes which occurred after the conquest of Florida and Georgia by people from Europe.

For instance, Juan Alonso Cabale was born in a Spanish mission, not a native village, and he had a Spanish name, not a Timucuan one. He was married to a Yamasee Indian woman whose ancestry was from Georgia or South Carolina and whose native language was a Muskogean dialect very different from the Timucua language; he did not marry a Timucuan woman. When he died, Juan Alonso Cabale was living in Cuba, not in Florida.

The reasons for these facts are found in the chapters that follow. We will learn that the ancestors of the Timucua had made their home in what is now northern Florida and southern Georgia for many generations. For thirteen millennia native American Indians had lived in what would become Timucuan territory, living off the land. The people fished, hunted, gathered wild plants, and cultivated crops.

Literally thousands of archaeological sites – village middens and sand mounds – still dot the landscape, offering mute testimony to the presence of these precolumbian people. Today names like Alachua, Arapaha, Aucilla, and Etoniah dot the landscape of Florida and southern Georgia, remnants of the world of the Timucua.

The Timucua were likely the first native American Indians living in what is now the southeastern United States to come in contact with people from the western hemisphere following Columbus's 1492 voyage. The first documented instance of such contact was with the expedition of the Spaniard Juan Ponce de Leon who landed on the Atlantic coast of northern Florida in 1513.

First Spain, then France, then Spain again sought to place the Timucua within their respective colonial empires. The history of the Timucua and the French and Spaniards in *La Florida*, as the southeastern United States was known, is so entwined that the story of the Timucuan people after 1513 cannot be told without also telling the story of the European explorers and colonists who invaded their land, bringing great changes to the Timucua's indigenous lifeways. Throughout the colonial period the Timucua sought to adjust to these changes and deal with the problems and challenges forced on them by the European

presence. To understand the Timucua is to understand the nature of European colonization and its impact. The very nature of Timucuan lifeways was in large part shaped by events of the colonial period.

Using the results of archaeological investigations at precolumbian villages and mounds we can reconstruct the culture of the ancestors of the Timucua prior to 1492, focusing on how they made a living, their material culture – tools and the like – and even aspects of social and political organization and their beliefs. And with both archaeological data and information gleaned from hundreds of Spanish and French documents and, to a lesser extent, English documents from the Carolinas, we can trace the history of the Timucua into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, providing insights into the impact of the European presence on native lifestyles.

In the early sixteenth century at the time of first contact with people from Europe native American Indians who spoke dialects of the Timucua language occupied most of the northern third of peninsular Florida, from the Aucilla River east to the Atlantic Ocean and south into the Lake District in Lake County west of Orlando. This large region includes the St Johns River north of Lake George and its tributary, the Ocklawaha. Timucua-speakers also lived in a significant portion of south-central and southeastern Georgia.

The exact region in Georgia inhabited by Timucua-speakers is undergoing revision as more documents from the mission period are interpreted. The best evidence now at hand suggests the extent of the Timucua in Georgia is much greater than previously supposed. Timucua-speakers were living as far north as the forks of the Oconee and Ocmulgee River, which join to form the Altamaha River. The Altamaha River apparently forms the northern boundary of the Timucua.

This is a huge region which encompasses Suwannee Creek, the Satilla River, and the wetlands of the Okefenokee Swamp. Along the coast Timucua-speakers lived on Cumberland, Jekyll, and St Simons islands. This large tract of modern-day Georgian Timucuan territory was nearly as extensive as the lands of the Timucua in northern Florida.

The many Timucua-speaking groups, or tribes, in northern Florida and southern Georgia were never united politically or ethnically. Indeed, some were at war with one another. It is their

shared language that allows us to refer to these groups as Timucua Indians.

As we shall see in chapters 1 and 2, specific Timucuan groups can be correlated with several different archaeological assemblages. This is the result of their living in different environmental zones and having different histories, some of which can be traced back in time hundreds of years into the precolumbian period. Chapter 2 further describes who the Timucuan groups were and where they lived when they were first encountered by people from Europe.

In chapters 3 and 4 we will recount the colonial period history of the various Timucuan groups: the first invasions and attempts at settlement by Spaniards and Frenchmen, the subsequent successful colonization by the Spaniards, and the establishment of Franciscan missions among the Timucua.

Chapters 5 to 7 describe aspects of Timucuan culture, such things as settlements, subsistence systems, social and political organization, and religion. Both information from archival sources and evidence from archaeology are used to show how these aspects of Timucuan societies changed as a result of Spanish conquest and colonization.

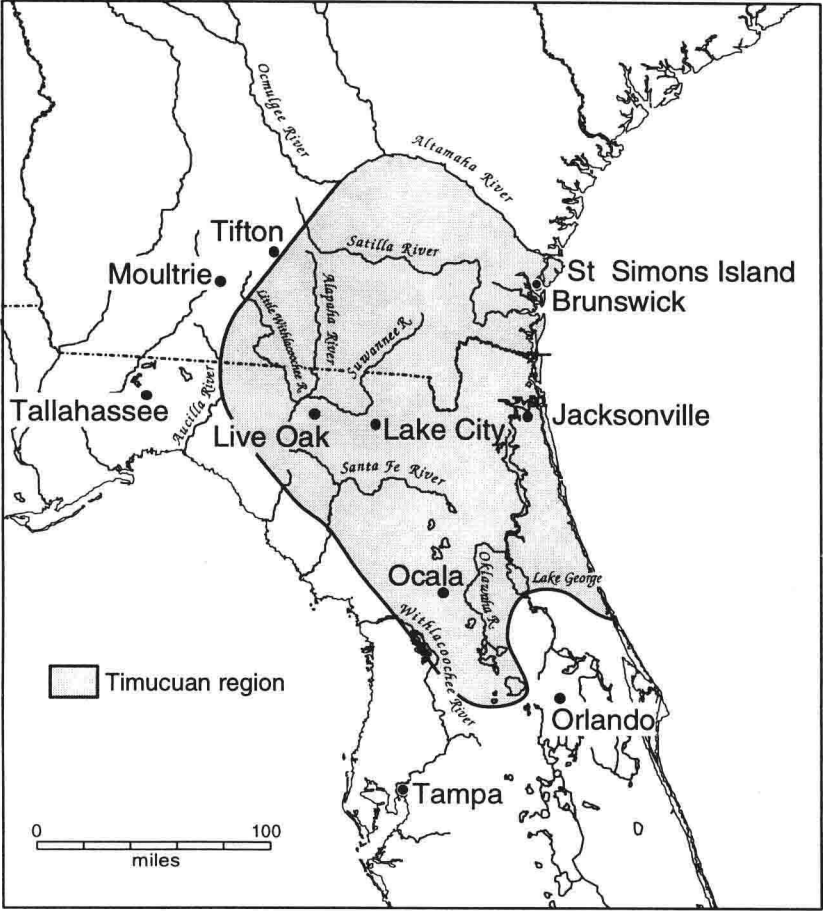
In the end the European conquest of La Florida proved catastrophic for the Timucua. Although they successfully adjusted to many aspects of the changes brought by the Spanish, the Timucua could not maintain their numbers in the face of diseases brought to North America from Europe and, perhaps, Africa. Epidemics and ill-health resulting from the stresses of colonization and the servitude it brought eventually overcame them. The final chapter traces the demise of the Timucua. Two hundred and fifty years after the landing of Juan Ponce de Leon, only one Timucua remained, Juan Alonso Cabale.

The Timucua were among the many American Indian groups who did not survive the European conquest of North and South America. The ancestors of Juan Alonso Cabale and the other Timucua Indians bore the brunt of colonial expansion, ultimately succumbing to it. Other groups in the eastern United States did survive the colonial era and their descendants today continue to live in that region and in Oklahoma.

It is my hope that learning about the Timucua will help all of us to better appreciate the histories of present-day native American Indian societies and the contributions those groups have

made to our modern world. All our histories have been shaped by the incredible events set in motion five centuries ago when Juan Ponce de Leon first sailed to La Florida.

In writing this book I have relied heavily on the work of my colleagues, both archaeologists and historians. Many of their contributions to our present knowledge of the Timucua are alluded to in the text and referenced in the bibliography. I thank them all, especially John Hann and John Worth, whose respective archival research has provided quantities of new information on the Timucuan missions of seventeenth-century Spanish Florida. John Worth and Dean Snow both read this manuscript and made many comments which improved it immensely. They both have my thanks. I also owe a heavy debt of gratitude to Kathleen Deagan, whose own research on the Timucua was largely responsible for my undertaking this book.



Modern Florida and Georgia with the Timucuan region shaded

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The Beginning

American Indians lived in the region occupied by the Timucua Indians for at least 13,000 years prior to the sixteenth century and the appearance of soldiers, friars, and colonists from Europe. Throughout those thirteen millennia changes in the native cultures occurred as people adjusted to alterations in climate, increasing populations, new ideas and innovations, and, perhaps, the immigration of new groups.

Numerous archaeological sites, remnants of places where precolumbian people once lived or carried out other activities, have been excavated. Artifacts and other evidence left by early native people at those sites have been used by archaeologists to chart the nature and development of native American cultures through time.

Because there is no written record for these earliest people, names taken from modern geographical landmarks or from other sources have been assigned to the various precolumbian cultures. We do not know what names the people used to refer to themselves. It is only in the colonial period when the Spaniards, French, and other Europeans, as well as some native individuals themselves, provided written accounts containing references to the indigenous societies that the names of native groups were recorded.

Even though we may not know what names the precolumbian groups used to refer to themselves or to one another, we can use archaeological evidence to trace colonial period native groups back into the precolumbian period. In some portions of the large region once inhabited by Timucua Indians we can confidently