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James B. Langford hace en este documento el análisis arqueológico e histórico de un objeto del siglo XVI hallado al noroeste de Georgia, en los Estados Unidos. Se trata de una placa con incisiones cuyos motivos son mesoamericanos. En el artículo, el autor propone la posibilidad de que éstos diseños constituyan una temprana representación de las apariciones guadalupanas. El Padre Xavier Escalada ha comentado este hallazgo en sucesivos artículos para el periódico *Excelsior*, de México. El grabado muestra a un indio con tilma anudada al hombro recibiendo (o dando) una especie de flor a una mujer con vestimenta y atributos igualmente indígenas.

The Coosawattee Plate: A Sixteenth-Century Catholic/Aztec Artifact from Northwest Georgia

By James B. Langford, Jr.

Recent efforts to delineate the routes of the sixteenth-century Spanish notables Hernando de Soto and Tristán de Luna have determined that the core of the indigenous province of Coosa was located along a 20-km stretch of the Coosawattee River in Northwest Georgia (Hudson et al. 1985; Langford and Smith 1986). The villages in this corridor share striking similarities with respect to ceramic assemblages and other cultural remains within the Barnett phase designation (A.D. 1450-1600) (Hally 1979:202).

Artifact collectors working on these Barnett phase sites have found a number of sixteenth-century European-type artifacts in direct association with indigenous materials within burials (Langford and Smith 1986). Most of these artifacts are assumed to be of Spanish origin since the area was abandoned by the seventeenth century (Smith 1987:76) and not reoccupied until the early eighteenth century. So far, these materials yield little additional information as to the specific expedition with which they may be associated.

Recently, however, an unusual copper "plate" or modified gorget found by an artifact collector at the Poarch Farm site (9Go1) is beginning to yield new and valuable information about these early expeditions. An incised picture on the plate suggests that it was manufactured in Mexico in the middle sixteenth century by an Aztec Indian. Such manufacture, if



accurately identified, would place the artifact with the Luna colonizing expedition of 1559-1561. The plate was brought to Northwest Georgia by a member of the expedition (perhaps as a book cover or other ornament), traded or given to a native inhabitant, modified into a gorget, and buried with presumably its last owner, a child of 10-11 years of age.

The Poarch Farm Site

The Poarch Farm site is one of seven known Barnett phase sites located on the Coosawattee River below the main Carter's Dam. The principal village of Coosa is thought to be located at the Little Egypt site (9Mu102) now covered by the reregulation lake immediately below Carter's Dam (Hudson et al. 1985). The Poarch Farm site is located approximately 7.6 km from the Little Egypt site.

Collectors worked extensively at the site during the late 1970s and early 1980s and excavated 300-400 burials in the Barnett phase occupation area. The property has changed hands in the past few years and the new landowner has stopped all digging on the site. Collectors recovered several European artifacts including glass beads (faceted chevron, Nueva Cadiz plain, and blown), iron spikes and wedges, Clarksdale brass bells, and pieces of swords and knives. All of the European items were found in seemingly aboriginal burials and almost always accompanied by other grave goods of indigenous manufacture. Most of the burials containing European artifacts occurred in a limited part of the site that was possibly a plaza.

In the fall of 1984, two collectors probing and excavating in the western end of the site uncovered a thin copper plate in a flexed burial. The skeletal remains were in a very poor state of preservation. No other grave goods were present in the burial pit. Examination of the teeth from the burial indicate that the individual was a subadult of 10-11 years of age beginning to experience changes in dentition from deciduous to permanent teeth (Robert Blakely, Bettina Detwefler, personal communication 1987).

Cleaning and Laboratory Analysis

The general condition of the plate is relatively poor; various states of corrosion, chemical stabilization, and bronze disease exist on the face of the artifact. The plate measures approximately 18 cm x 8.5 cm x .098 cm. Owing to the brittle nature of the metal and the relatively unfavorable environmental condition of interment, the plate is broken into 23



contiguous pieces and numerous other discontinuous fragments. At least two holes measuring 0.4 cm in diameter were drilled in the center of the plate as it was adapted by Indians in the Southeast for use as a gorget. Two additional holes were punched or drilled approximately 1.0 cm from the edge of both left and right sides of the plate. Other features of the plate are the 26 raised "punch" marks around the intact portions of the perimeter of the plate. Originally, these probably extended around the entire perimeter. Examination of these punch marks has not revealed whether the marks were a decorative feature or served the functional purpose of securing the plate to leather or fabric.

During extensive laboratory analysis and conservation, soils and some sulfides were carefully removed from the artifact. However, no attempt was made to remove most of the corrosive deposits from the plate surface because preliminary examination of these deposits revealed many kinds of organic material preserved by the copper sulfides. Also, the incised lines are very shallow and almost obliterated in some areas where corrosive activity has been most destructive. Removal of the sulfide deposits would destroy the remaining traces of incised lines in these areas.

Examination of the incised lines revealed that the lines were made via a "step-cut" method utilizing a stone tool (Gohn Leader, personal communication 1987). This repoussé technique involves the careful retracing of lines or pictorial representations. Because these lines were repeatedly retraced, no 'stray' lines have been found on the artifact. Each line was carefully and purposefully cut into the face of the plate. Metallic composition of the plate is presumed to be predominantly copper. Because of the corroded nature of the discontinuous fragments, meaningful neutron activation analysis was not possible. Uncorroded metal is present in some of the contiguous pieces, but the removal of metal for testing would necessitate defacement, albeit minor, of artistically significant areas. Such a trade-off at this time seems unnecessary, at least with regard to determining the origin of manufacture. Incising techniques and stylistic treatment provide sufficient information to ascertain where and by whom the plate was made.

Analysis of the Elements of the Incising

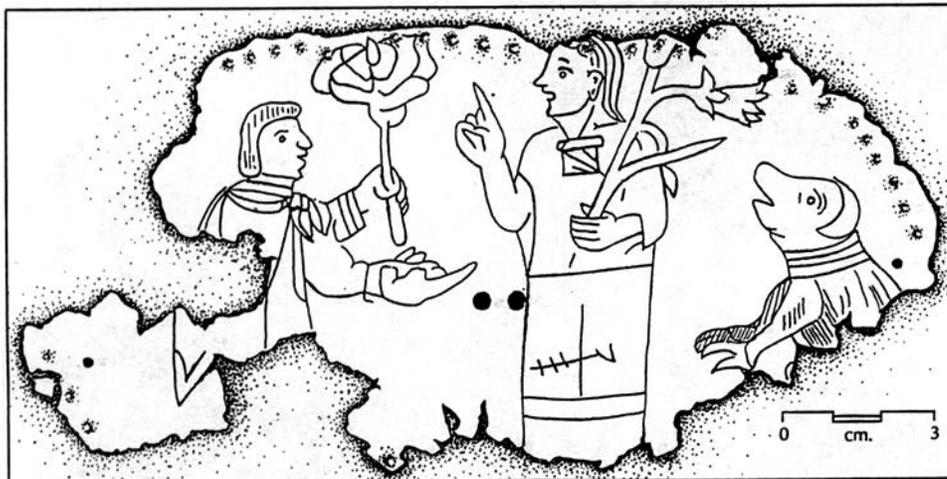


Figure 10-1. The Coosawattee plate.

Understanding the meaning of the incised design requires an analysis of (1) the individual elements, (2) the style of aggregation of the elements, and (3) the historical and cultural context of the artifact. This analysis demonstrated a blend of Christian and Aztec religious ideas representative of the ethnohistorical context of mid-sixteenth-century Mexico. The plate has three incised characters that we call Character A, B, and C. Character A is in the center of the plate and Characters B and C appear on the left and right sides of the plate, respectively (see Figure 10-1).

We can begin the analysis of the individual elements with the most dominant figure, Character A. The hand of this figure is relatively oversized in relation to the rest of the figure and the index finger extends prominently, while the thumb holds down the other fingers. The left hand clasps the end of a flowering or leafed branch that rests on the left shoulder.

The raised hand and open mouth indicate that the character is speaking. Some Aztec postconquest codices contain "speech scrolls" emanating from the mouths of those who are speaking. Other illustrations of the same period lack such speech designations even when speech is obviously intended. Lack of consistency in this regard can probably be attributed to differences in artistic style and expression. The almost vertical position of the hand and arm indicates that Character A is agreeing to or accepting a command or request, and the horizontal position of the extended arm and hand of Character B confirms this relationship between the two characters (Troike 1975).



The clothing of Character A features the stamped rectangular neck design of the traditional huipilli worn by Aztec Indian women of early colonial period and preconquest Mexico (Anawalt 1981:52-53). The hair of Character A appears to flow over the shoulders and down the back, which probably denotes a young woman. In sixteenth-century drawings young women usually have longer hair (Lienzo de Tlaxcala 1979:Lamina 7). Drawings of Marina, Cortez's interpreter and wife of a lieutenant of Cortez, depict her with both long and short hair styles (Lienzo de Tlaxcala 1979:Lámina 2-4; Sahagún 1950-1969:12:Illustrations 1, 22, 44).

The flowers or flowering branch could be one of several types of flowers described in the Florentine Codex. The blossoms most closely resemble the azcalxochitl or the iopixochitl (Sahagún 1950-1969:11:illustrations 707, 708). Crossreferencing these flower types with the Sahagún texts regarding Aztec deities or even everyday life has thus far not produced any correlations. The fact that the sixteenth-century documents lack any pictorial representations of females carrying flowers in such a manner is probably significant. Occasionally, women and deities are shown carrying plants and even flowers, but such depictions of flowers are quite different from the Coosawattee Plate and the manner of carrying or presenting them is always with the items held away from the body (Sahagún 1950-1969:2:Illustrations 5-12).

Another notable incised feature of the female character on the plate is the slightly diagonal line (with hash marks across it) that appears on the lower section of the skirt. This design was cut carefully and repeatedly in the same manner as the rest of the incising and therefore carries some significance as a decoration or symbol. One reference in the text of the Florentine Codex may provide a valuable clue to the meaning of the design. The reference is to "torn and mended skirts" that Aztec women wore at certain times as a means of appearing more modest and less attractive (Sahagún 1950-1969:12:118).

Some pictorial precedents do exist for the display of stitching on the seams of skirts of Aztec women, but not stitching that is perpendicular to the natural seams of the skirts in the manner of the Coosawattee Plate. Representations that display the stitched seams are usually associated with women of lower status, even drunken and downtrodden (Anawalt 1981:54). The practice of wearing old skirts continues into present-day Mexico among Indian and mixed-race rural women when they come to trade in the marketplace. Presumably, these women strive to look more



modest in order to enhance their bargaining positions John Aguilar, personal communication 1987).

Because of the care taken to depict other rather delicate details (eyes, ears, and even shading of some areas), we can infer that the diagonal design on the skirt is exactly what it appears to be a jagged and straight tear that has been mended. The reason for showing this woman to be modest in appearance will become clearer as we analyze the other elements of the design, the intentions of the artist, and the blended Aztec and Christian influences.

Character B is wearing the traditional tilmatlí, or cloak, worn by Aztec men of sixteenth-century and preconquest Mexico (Anawalt 1981:30). The cloak is knotted at the neck. The figure is also wearing what appears to be a closed-sleeve shirt or camisa (Patricia Anawalt, personal communication 1989). Shirts of this kind were not common in preconquest Mexico but appear to be somewhat more prevalent in the postconquest sixteenth century. The Florentine Codex shows several examples of Aztec males wearing the cloak and the camisa together (Sahagún 1950-1969:9:Illustrations 58, 59; 10:Illustrations 53, 51).

Representation of the hair, including very light striations depicting the "grain" of the hair styling, is almost identical to examples in the sixteenth-century sources (Sahagún 1950-1969:9:illustration 58; 12:illustrations 22, 71, 101; Wauchope 1975:14:3:Figure 70). In preconquest Mexico, head adornments and clothing styles reflected important delineations of social status. Usually the cloak was knotted at the right shoulder. However, certain nobles and priests apparently were allowed to knot the cloak in the front. FEgh-status individuals would also wear various types of colored feathers in the hair as a corresponding badge of rank (Anawalt 1981:30). Character B wears no such head adornments, a fact somewhat inconsistent with the cloak knotted at the neck. However, examples do exist that clearly show messengers from Montezuma to Cortéz who have cloaks knotted in the front but who also do not have head adornments of any kind (Sahagún 1950-1969:12:illustrations ", 25, 26).

The right hand of Character B is relatively oversized and extends toward Character A with the palm up and the index finger extended. As previously mentioned, the horizontal position of the arm and hand indicates that Character B is making a request or command (Troike 1975).

Character B is carrying either a torch or a flower, possibly a rose, in the left hand. The identification of the torch was made after reviewing the sixteenth-century Mexican codices and comparing the item to representations of fire, smoke, torches, and plumed (feathered) staffs. Although a duplicate example of the item has not been found in the



sixteenth-century references or in any later codex, the smoke may be inferred by comparison with the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950-1959:12: Illustrations 5, 25, 49). Several examples of plumed staffs exist in the sixteenth-century codices, and these are distinctly different from the item represented on the copper plate (Sahagún 1950-1969:12:Illustrations 5, 25, 49). The item could also represent an oversized flower such as a rose. The historical and artistic context, discussed later in this chapter, lend credence to this possibility.

Character C appears on the right side of the face of the copper plate and on Character A's left side. Character C is an animal-type figure with a pronounced snout and multiclawed or cloven foot. These features appear inconsistent with easily recognizable animals. A review of the various sixteenth-century sources reveals a limited number of creatures that resemble Character C. The representation is not consistent with sixteenth-century Aztec examples of indigenous dogs or catlike creatures. Both animals are always drawn with the teeth displayed and the ears usually pointed (Sabagún 1950-1969:11:illustrations 1-14).

Besides horses, sixteenth-century drawings of domesticated animals introduced by the Spanish are very rare. However, we could speculate that the figure is a homed animal such as a goat, sheep, or bull. Among European domesticated animals, the closest possible matches would probably be an ox or a pig. The "clawed" foot could be a cloven hoof and the earlike flap could represent a downturned horn or an oversized and rounded ear (Sahagún 1950-1969:12:Illustration 1).

Another kind of animal, the axolotl, might also fit the features of the animal depicted on the plate. The axolotl was an amphibious creature that occupied a special place in Aztec mythology as a feared man-eating anomaly. The axolotl, as drawn and described in the Sahagún documents, had strong short limbs with powerful claws. The nose was blunted and the mouth had no teeth. Alongside the head grew fanlike gills that were quite distinctive and the neck had skin folds similar to the horizontal bands on the neck of the incised animal (Sahagún 1950-1969:11:illustration 218). These features fit a variety of actual salamander-like animals and one in particular carries the name axolotl today. It is probably the same axolotl of the preconquest Aztec.

Interpretation of the Incising

Detailed study of the aggregation of the 'incised elements represented on the Coosawattee Plate begins to reveal more about the message intended by the artist and presents us with two potential



interpretations: (1) the scene depicts an event important in the life of some individual Aztec, or a historical or religious event important to a somewhat wider number of Aztecs, or (2) the incising graphically represents the blending of a European-style Virgin Mary with Aztec metaphors in order to depict a specific event of Christian or Aztec religious nature. The aggregations of elements is consistent with sixteenth-century depictions of the Annunciation and also with the sixteenth-century syncretic origins of the Marian cult of the Lady of Guadalupe de Tepeyac.

The first scenario would imply that the incising substantially carries the style and elemental arrangement of sixteenth-century Aztec artistry. While the individual elements of the scene depicted on the plate are undoubtedly sixteenth-century Aztec in nature (Charles Dibble, Jesse Jennings, personal communication 1987), the evidence is compelling that the style of the aggregation or use of elements contained in the scene is very different from any known Aztec or Mexican contexts of any time period (Patricia Anawalt, Hasso von Winning, personal communication 1989).

The second potential interpretation of the aggregated images incised on the plate is that the plate displays an attempt by an Aztec artist to incorporate Aztec characters into a Christian-influenced religious scene. The arrangement of the elements in the incising corresponds substantially with religious scenes on various European book covers, especially Bibles, and other ornaments from the period A.D. 1200-1700.

Two of the most common types of scenes and motifs feature a female as the central character. These females are the Virgin Mary at the moment of the Annunciation of the coming of Christ (the visitation by the angel Gabriel) or as part of the Nativity at the birth of Christ, and the Woman of Revelation, as described in Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelations. Religious leaders in Europe debated the distinction between the two female characters and finally declared at the Council of Trent in 1556, perhaps as an admission of the evolution of common belief, that the Woman of Revelation was, in fact, the Virgin Mary (Henkel 1973: 18).

Depictions of the Virgin Mary in both the Annunciation and the Nativity usually included some representation of a Tree of Life, also called a Tree of Jesse, in close proximity to the female character. Sometimes the Virgin is shown actually holding a budded branch or blossoming flowers (usually lilies, called Annunciation lilies, and occasionally roses). This foliage represents multiple meanings: the lineage of Jesse out of which the prophet Isaiah predicted that Christ would come, and the fertility of the Virgin. In some artistic renderings of the Virgin, the foliage is shown as a prominent motif and sometimes as merely a decorative border (Child



and Colles 1971:88-89, 159, 243). Scenes of the Annunciation often include foliage or flowers even held and presented to the Virgin by the angel Gabriel. The angel usually appears on the left side of Annunciation scenes and the Virgin appears on the right (Rothenstein 1951:19, 21, 29; Emily Umberger, personal communication 1987).

The Coosawattee Plate has a combination of elements consistent with Euro-pean scenes of the Annunciation. The male figure could represent the angel Gabriel delivering a message of instruction, indicated by the extended hand and arm, to the female figure. The female responds in agreement as indicated by the raised and almost vertical arm. She carries the flowers or branch consistent with other Annunciation scenes, and the artist portrays her as a woman of modest background by use of the symbolic tom and mended skirt. This portrayal of modesty would be consistent with the teachings of the Franciscans in postconquest Mexico who often represented the Virgin as a modest housewife, easily approached (Taylor 1987).

The angel carries a torch to offer illumination in the same way that rays of the sun penetrate the room of the Virgin in some European examples of the Annunciation. Ellen Baird (personal communication, 1989) suggests that the "torch" might instead be an oversized representation of a rose, which would also be consistent with some artistic versions of the Annunciation. The animal is not consistent with European representations of the Annunciation, but animals do appear quite frequently in other scenes involving the Virgin, especially the Nativity scenes where oxen and donkeys are most common (Child and Colles 1971:89).

An alternative scenario would argue that the scene represents the appearance of the Woman of Revelation as described in the Book of Revelations. This part of the Bible provided an extremely rich source for graphic representations of all kinds of miraculous events, creatures, and superhuman characters. These representations became quite prevalent in architecture, art, and ornaments as the official church became more obsessed with keeping a vigilant watch for the coming of the Apocalypse and the subsequent arrival of the Kingdom of God.

One of the most commonly reproduced scenes from Chapter 12 of Revelations describes a woman who appeared in the sky "clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown with twelve stars: And her being with child cried out' (Henkel 1973:88).

Artistic renderings of this woman in the sky are surprisingly similar from the eighth through the sixteenth century. The modest demeanor, the cloak (or sometimes crown) with stars, the crescent moon at the feet, the rays of the sun, and the child are elements present in most artistic



representations during that period. The artistic representation of the Lady of Guadalupe de Tepeyac, supposedly painted by miraculous means, is almost an exact duplicate of European representations of the Woman of Revelation from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Some historians believe that the painting was made in 1556, more than 20 years after the miraculous event supposedly responsible for its creation (LaFaye 1976:241).

The central female character of the Coosawattee Plate does not have any of the characteristics normally associated with the Woman of Revelation, although some might argue that the animal figure is an axolotl and therefore represents the Beast of the Apocalypse that threatens the Woman of Revelation, as it does in some other European pictorial representations of the sixteenth century. The incising does, however, have elements consistent with the legendary origin of the Lady of Guadalupe de Tepeyac.

According to the popular legend, this painting miraculously appeared on the cloak of an Aztec convert, Juan Diego, in 1531 after a woman mysteriously appeared to him three times on or near the hill of Tepeyac, the site of traditional Aztec rituals in celebration of the goddess Tonantzin. The woman instructed Diego to go and pick flowers from the hill and bring them to her. When he returned, she took them from him and then gave them back. She instructed him to take them to the archbishop, Zumirraga. Upon unfolding his cloak before the archbishop, he noticed the beautiful color painting that had miraculously appeared on his cloak.

The story was actually created in 1648 by Miguel Sanchez and closely parallels the appearance of the Lady of Guadalupe de Extremadura in Spain in the thirteenth century (LaFaye 1976:217-224), but the story may also have roots in pictorial representations of other religious events such as the Annunciation. While the copper plate may represent a specific Christian religious event, it does so with Aztec characters and features a Virgin Mary in Aztec clothing. Some researchers believe that the Aztecs related the Virgin to a female in their own belief system, probably Cihuacoatl, also called Tonantzin, or "Our Mother" (LaFaye 1976:215). This created a syncretic female that became a bridge between the traditional beliefs of the Aztecs and the new Christian ideas being so pervasively and urgently presented to them by the new rulers of Mexico.



Conclusions

The Coosawattee Plate was found buried with an Indian child at the Poarch Farm site in Northwest Georgia where investigations reveal a Barnett phase occupation that was abandoned before the seventeenth century. Research also indicates that the Poarch Farm site was one of the larger villages of the capital of Coosa, which was visited by de Soto in 1540 and a small contingent of the Luna expedition in 1560. The Luna group left Mexico City in 1559 to found a colony in the southeastern United States (see Milanich, this volume).

The method of manufacture of the Coosawattee Plate and the stylistic treatment of the incised characters indicate that the plate was made by an Aztec Indian in central Mexico during the middle sixteenth century and no later than 1559, the date of departure of the Luna party from Mexico City. While the artifact could have been manufactured en route to Northwest Georgia, it is proposed here that a more likely setting for the manufacture of the plate would have been a metal workshop in Mexico City. Such a workshop could have been a church-sponsored or sanctioned activity where native artisans were encouraged to use their talents for the benefit of the church and its ongoing educational efforts among the native populations.

The possibility does exist that the artifact was made in the Southeast by some member of the Luna expedition. However, the uniformity of thinness of the plate, its brittleness, and lack of annealing exfoliation suggest that it was manufactured by someone who had the right tools and conditions to produce a metal object of relatively high quality.

The purpose of the plate was to serve as an adornment for a book (probably a Bible) or some other religious item. Oval-shaped copper plates that were engraved and also enameled or pigmented were used as Bible cover ornaments in Europe during and after the sixteenth century. Such plates were also used as decorative additions to Bible boxes, wooden boxes used for the storage of Bibles and other objects. These boxes were also used as writing desks and for the storage of documents (Day 1907: 167-180). Until now, no copper ornaments with pictorial incising such as the Coosawattee Plate are known to have been manufactured in Mexico during the sixteenth century (Hasso von Winning, personal communication 1989). The artist or metalworker may have seen a similar ornament of European origin and copied the style of manufacture and incising.

We can speculate that this book or box ornament was given (and perhaps created) as a gift to one of the Dominican priests who



accompanied the Luna expedition from Mexico City to the coast of La Florida and eventually to Northwest Georgia. While trying to associate the artifact with a particular person may be stretching the imagination, we do know that one of only about 200 people (the size of the smaller contingent of the Luna expedition) brought the artifact to Northwest Georgia and only two of the group, the priests Domingo de la Anunciación and Domingo de Salazar, were likely to be in possession of books or boxes that might be decorated in such a way. Biographical information about Anunciación reveals that he possessed a Bible box in which he stored personal documents (Divila Padilla 1955:622). The coincidence of the ordained name, Anunciación, and the potential interpretation of the incising regarding the Annunciation at least merits mention. His biography also details his extensive work with the native population in Mexico during which he could have encountered a student who made the plate as part of a personal gift, or he could have acquired it in any number of other ways.

After being made in Mexico and brought to Northwest Georgia, the plate or perhaps an entire book or box was given or traded to some aboriginal individual at Coosa. The plate was then adapted for use as a gorget and buried with a child.

Regarding the incising, the native artisan chose to either copy a scene depicted in the same or in another medium or to extract images from various sources in order to visually convey a religious idea. Whether the incised scene was a copied or original design, European iconographic and artistic style influences are unmistakably present. The incised design probably depicts the Annunciation of the birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary, but does so by using distinctively Aztec characters and artistic elements.

The plate, therefore, reflects in style and message the blending of Aztec and Catholic religious ideas that ethnohistorical sources relate when discussing the early days of the Marian cult of the Lady of Guadalupe. The artifact also helps delineate a trend in the development of the cult: the gradual change from a decidedly Aztec deity origin to a Europeanized Woman of Revelation/Virgin Mary. Changes in the visual representation of the Tonantzin/Guadalupe character during the sixteenth century reflected the conscious influence of the official church as it endorsed images and ideas that did not deviate significantly from accepted European Catholic ideology. The well-known painting of the Lady of Guadalupe demonstrates the influence of the church on this trend as the church embraced the painting and gave it special status in the new basilica established in 1555.



Jacques LaFaye (1976:242) explains how Miguel Sanchez in 1648 crystallized and embellished the oral tradition of the origin of the Lady of Guadalupe and left behind a well-defined story complete with apparitions, miracles, and quaint characters. Thus armed with a visual representation and a story, the official church in New Spain moved forward in its task of spreading the gospel throughout the hemisphere under the protecting and nurturing image of the patroness. But as William Taylor (1987) has recently pointed out, the Indian population from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century may not have been as devoted to the patroness as the Spanish and mixed populations. One reason proposed here is that the Europeanized version of the Lady of Guadalupe and its embracement by the church may have moved the cult away from its Indian roots too far and too fast as the church searched for a way to endorse this popular "pagan" devotion.

With regard to archaeological and ethnohistorical significance, the plate is an additional piece of evidence to support the research of Charles Hudson and his colleagues regarding the routes of de Soto' Luna, and Pardo through the Southeast. Their research and the supporting evidence demonstrate that the capital of the sixteenth-century paramount chiefdom of Coosa was located on the Coosawattee River in Northwest Georgia. This capital comprised at least six villages, the main political center being the Little Egypt site.

However, the Luna accounts also relate that two other villages in this capital core or polity were larger than the capitol village (Hudson 1988). The Poarch Farm site was probably one of these two villages, and the copper plate and the other trade items found at the site indicate that significant interaction occurred there between the Indian population and the Luna expedition. It is surprising that medallions and cruciforms of various kinds have not been found at this site or other sites visited by Luna. Of course, most of the expedition's supplies were lost in Pensacola Bay and among the lost items may have been the religious trade items. Further investigations at the Poarch Farm site and other Luna contexts may yet yield other European or Mexican religious items.

The Coosawattee Plate provides a tangible and remarkable example of the crosscurrents of change sweeping through the Western Hemisphere in the sixteenth century. The history of the artifact parallels the history of the era: manufactured by a native of Mexico, influenced by the Christian religion of Europe, carried hundreds of miles to an unsettled frontier, traded for food or given as a gift, adapted for use by another culture, and finally buried with a child in a village soon thereafter abandoned.



Our scientific methods generally require that we remain cautious and even detached from discussions of simple and particular human motivations associated with the history of a single artifact. Occasionally, however, an artifact and its context compel the researcher to try to understand those individuals who created and possessed the item in order to extract something more personal from the artifact than mere data. The Coosawattee Plate richly deserves such an indulgence.

Acknowledgments

The story of this intriguing artifact could be called one chronicle of the early history of the Americas, or perhaps some might call it a mere footnote. But it is also a detective story that winds its way from a bait shop in Calhoun, Georgia, to museums and universities and laboratories in a dozen states and Mexico. I found it necessary to draw upon the advice and experience of many people from several different disciplines in order to begin the process of unraveling the mystery of the artifacts process that may continue for years to come. For their professional and personal opinions and the time they gave me, I extend many thanks to John Aguilar, Patricia Anawalt, Ellen Baird, Robert Blakeley, Bettina Detweiler, Charles Dibble, Mike Gannon, Kathryn Jakes, Jesse Jennings, Steve Kowaleski, John Leader, Jerry Milanich, Susan Power, Barbara Stark, Emily Umberger, and Hasso von Winning. David Hally and Charles Hudson provided invaluable reference and logistical advice. Richard Bryant lent his significant photographic skills to the project, as did Jack Shrum who provided the photomicroscope expertise. Neil Shulman arranged the X-ray studies, and Juhe Bames-Smith and Jodie Lewis spent many hours working on drawings. Kerry McBrayer processed and organized many of the notes and reference material. I am thankful for the time they donated so eagerly. Wayne Long, John Long, Jon Wear, Quentin Haynes, and Mike Holland provided critical information to the effort. I am also quite grateful to Jon Griffin who was particularly generous in his contribution to the research. Also, I extend special thanks to Marvin Smith for his considerable encouragement and support.

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