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Early Visions of Florida

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1565

## Voyage Made by M. John Hawkins

John Sparke

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# Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

## John Sparke, The Voyage Made by M. John Hawkins

*Unicorns and three-headed monsters—only one of many points of interest in this*



- Magdalena and Willem de Passe, Portrait of Sir John Hawkins (National Portrait Gallery, London)

*fascinating account, which delivers the English their first knowledge of Florida. John Sparke “the younger” was born to a genteel family in Plymouth, England. The remainder of his life is uncertain, save that he accompanied John Hawkins’ second voyage to the Spanish colonies, recording the expedition in The Voyage Made by M. John Hawkins Esquire, 1565, a portion of which is presented here. Sparke’s account first reports Hawkins’ experiences on the African coast as well as some in the West Indies. However, what is of particular importance to us is his subsequent description of Florida, its people, customs, landscape, wildlife, and interaction with the French previously settled there.*

*Sir John Hawkins was born in 1532, also in Plymouth, England. No small figure of his day, the list of Hawkins’ accomplishments runs long: naval administrator, commander, one of the foremost seamen of 16th-century England, chief architect of the Elizabethan navy, slaver, and leader of the recounted expedition to Florida. Hawkins’s interference in the slave trade between Africa and Spanish colonies stirred relations between the English and the Spanish, which would eventually culminate in war in 1585. Beyond his exploits in the slave trade, which was the intent of this his second voyage, Hawkins’ journey to Florida as recorded by Sparke invited more English commercial expeditions to the Spanish colonies; Sparke’s detail and style in particular not only ignited the imagination of the English, but influenced later reporting of voyages.*

Edited by Christina Lopez, University of South Florida St Petersburg

### **Further Reading**

“[Sir John Hawkins](#).” Encyclopædia Britannica, 29 July 2016, [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

Hakluyt, Richard. *The Principall Navigations Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Hakluyt Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem, 1965.

John Sparke. “[The Voyage Made by M. John Hawkins Esquire, 1565](#).” From Henry S. Burrage (ed.), *Early English and French Voyages, Chiefly from Hakluyt, 1534-1608*. New York: Scribner’s, 1906.

.... In ranging this coast along, the captaine found it to be all an Island, and therefore it is all lowe land, and very scant of fresh water, but the countrey was marvellously sweet, with both marish and medow ground, and goodly woods among. There they found sorell to grow as abundantly as grasse, and where their houses were, great store of maiz and mill, and grapes of great bignesse, but of taste much like our English grapes. Also Deere great plentie, which came upon the sands before them. Their houses are not many together, for in one house an hundred of them do lodge; they being made much like a great barne, and in strength not inferiour to ours, for they have stanchions and rafters of whole trees, and are covered with palmito-leaves, having no place divided, but one small roome for their king and queene. In the middest of this house is a hearth, where they make great fires all night, and they sleepe upon certeine pieces of wood hewin in for the bowing of their backs, and another place made high for their heads, which they put one by another all along the walles on both sides. In their houses they remaine onely in the nights, and in

the day they desire the fields, where they dresse their meat, and make provision for victuals, which they provide onely for a meale from hand to mouth. There is one thing to be marvelled at, for the making of their fire, and not onely they but also the Negros doe the same, which is made onely by two stickes, rubbing them one against another: and this they may doe in any place they come, where they finde sticks sufficient for the purpose. In their apparell the men onely use deere skinnes, wherewith some onely cover their privy members, other some use the same as garments to cover them before and behind; which skinnes are painted, some yellow and red, some blacke and russet, and every man according to his owne fancy. They do not omit to paint their bodies also with curious knots, or antike worke, as every man in his owne fancy deviseth, which painting, to make it continue the better, they use with a thorne to pricke their flesh, and dent in the same, whereby the painting may have better hold. In their warres they use a sleighter colour of painting their faces, whereby to make themselves shew the more fierce; which after their warres ended, they wash away againe. In their warres they use bowes and arrowes, whereof their bowes are made of a kind of Yew, but blacker then ours, and for the most part passing the strength of the Negros or Indians, for it is not greatly inferior to ours: their arrowes are also of a great length, but yet of reeds like other Indians, but varying in two points, both in length and also for nocks and feathers, which the other lacke, whereby they shoot very stedy: the heads of the same are vipers teeth, bones of fishes, flint stones, piked points of knives, which they having gotten of the French men, broke the same, and put the points of them in their arrowes heads: some of them have their heads of silver, othersome that have want of these, put in a kinde of hard wood, notched, which pierceth as farre as any of the rest. In their fight, being in the woods, they use a marvellous pollicie for their owne safegard, which is by clasping a tree in their armes, and yet shooting notwithstanding: this policy they used with the French men in their fight, whereby it appeareth that they are people of some policy: and although they are called by the Spanyards Gente triste, that is to say, Bad people, meaning thereby, that they are not men of capacity: yet have the French men found them so witty in their answeres, that by the captaines owne report, a counsellor with us could not give a more profound reason.

The women also for their apparell use painted skinnes, but most of them gownes of mosse, somewhat longer then our mosse, which they sowe together artificially, and make the same surplesse wise, wearing their haire down to their shoulders, like the Indians. In this river of May afore sayd, the captaine entring with his pinnesse, found a French ship of fourscore tun, and two pinneses of fifteene tun a piece, by her, and speaking with the keepers thereof, they tolde him of a fort two leagues up, which they had built, in which their captaine Monsieur Laudonniere was, with certeine souldiers therein. To whom our captaine sending to understand of a watering place, where he might conveniently take it in, and to have licence for the same, he straight, because there was no convenient place but up the river five leagues, where the water was fresh, did send him a pilot for the more expedition thereof, to bring in one of his barks, which going in with other boats provided for the same purpose, ankered before the fort, into the which our captaine went; where hee was by the Generall, with other captaines and souldiers, very gently entertained, who declared unto him the time of their being there, which was fourteene moneths, with the extremity they were driven to for want of victuals, having brought very little with them; in which place they being two hundred men at their first comming, had in short space eaten all the maiz they could buy of the inhabitants about them, and therefore were driven certeine of them to serve a king of the Floridians against other his enemies, for mill and other victuals: which having gotten could not serve them, being so many, so long a time: but want came upon them in such sort, that they were

faine to gather acorns, which being stamped small, and often washed, to take away the bitterness of them, they did use for bread, eating withall sundry times, roots, whereof they found many good and wholesome, and such as serve rather for medicines then for meates alone. But this hardnesse not contenting some of them, who would not take the paines so much as to fish in the river before their doores, but would have all things put in their mouthes, they did rebell against the captaine, taking away first his armour, and afterward imprisoning him: and so to the number of fourescore of them, departed with a barke and a pinnesse, spoiling their store of victuall, and taking away a great part thereof with them, and so went to the Islands of Hispaniola and Jamaica a roving, where they spoiled and pilld the Spanyards; and having taken two caravels laden with wine and casavi, which is a bread made of roots, and much other victuals and treasure, had not the grace to depart therewith, but were of such haughty stomacks, that they thought their force to be such that no man durst meddle with them, and so kept harborow in Jamaica, going dayly ashore at their pleasure. But God which would not suffer such evill doers unpunished, did indurate their hearts in such sort, that they lingered the time so long, that a ship and galliasse being made out of Santa Domingo came thither into the harborow, and tooke twenty of them, whereof the most part were hanged, and the rest caried into Spaine, and some (to the number of five and twenty) escaped in the pinnesse, and came to Florida; where at their landing they were put in prison, and incontinent foure of the chiefest being condemned, at the request of the souldiers, did passe the harquebuzers, and then were hanged upon a gibbet. This lacke of threescore men was a great discouragement and weakening to the rest, for they were the best souldiers that they had: for they had now made the inhabitants weary of them by their dayly craving of maiz, having no wares left to content them withall, and therefore were inforced to rob them, and to take away their victual perforce, which was the occasion that the Floridians (not well contented therewith) did take certeine of their company in the woods, and slew them; whereby there grew great warres betwixt them and the Frenchmen: and therefore they being but a few in number durst not venture abroad, but at such times as they were inforced thereunto for want of food to do the same: and going twenty harquebuzers in a company, were set upon by eightene kings, having seven or eight hundred men, which with one of their bowes slew one of their men, and hurt a dozen, and drove them all downe to their boats; whose pollicy in fight was to be marvelled at: for having shot at divers of their bodies which were armed, and perceiving that their arrowes did not prevaile against the same, they shot at their faces and legs, which were the places that the Frenchmen were hurt in. Thus the Frenchmen returned, being in ill case by the hurt of their men, having not above forty souldiers left unhurt, whereby they might ill make any more invasions upon the Floridians, and keepe their fort withall: which they must have beene driven unto, had not God sent us thither for their succour; for they had not above ten dayes victuall left before we came. In which perplexity our captaine seeing them, spared them out of his ship twenty barrels of meale, and foure pipes of beanes, with divers other victuals and necessaries which he might conveniently spare: and to helpe them the better homewardest, whither they were bound before our comming, at their request we spared them one of our barks of fifty tun. Notwithstanding the great want that the Frenchmen had, the ground doth yeeld victuals sufficient, if they would have taken paines to get the same; but they being souldiers desired to live by the sweat of other mens browes: for while they had peace with the Floridians, they had fish sufficient, by weares which they made to catch the same: but when they grew to warres, the Floridians tooke away the same againe, and then would not the Frenchmen take the paines to make any more. The ground yeeldeth naturally grapes in great store, for in the time that the Frenchmen were there, they made 20 hogsheads of wine. Also it yeeldeth roots passing good, Deere marvellous store, with divers other beasts, and fowle,

serviceable to the use of man. These be things wherewith a man may live, having corne or maiz wherewith to make bread: for maiz maketh good savory bread, and cakes as fine as flowre. Also it maketh good meale, beaten and sodden with water, and eateth like pap wherewith we feed children. It maketh also good beverage, sodden in water, and nourishable; which the Frenchmen did use to drinke of in the morning, and it assuageth their thirst, so that they had no need to drinke all the day after. And this maiz was the greatest lacke they had, because they had no labourers to sowe the same, and therefore to them that should inhabit the land it were requisit to have labourers to till and sowe the ground: for they having victuals of their owne, whereby they neither rob nor spoile the inhabitants, may live not onely quietly with them, who naturally are more desirous of peace then of warres, but also shall have abundance of victuals proffered them for nothing: for it is with them as it is with one of us, when we see another man ever taking away from us, although we have enough besides, yet then we thinke all too little for our selves: for surely we have heard the Frenchmen report, and I know it by the Indians, that a very little contenteth them: for the Indians with the head of maiz roasted, will travell a whole day, and when they are at the Spanyards finding, they give them nothing but sodden herbs and maiz: and in this order I saw threescore of them feed, who were laden with wares, and came fifty leagues off. The Floridians when they travell, have a kinde of herbe dried, who with a cane and an earthen cup in the end, with fire, and the dried herbs put together, doe sucke thorow the cane the smoke thereof, which smoke satisfieth their hunger, and therewith they live foure or five dayes without meat or drinke, and this all the Frenchmen used for this purpose: yet do they holde opinion withall, that it causeth water and fleame to void from their stomacks. The commodities of this land are more then are yet knowen to any man: for besides the land it selfe, whereof there is more then any Christian king is able to inhabit, it flourisheth with medow, pasture ground, with woods of Cedar and Cypres, and other sorts, as better can not be in the world. They have for apothecary herbs, trees, roots and gummes great store, as Storax liquida, Turpentine, Gumme, Myrrhe, and Frankinsence, with many others, whereof I know not the names. Colours both red, blacke, yellow, and russet, very perfect, wherewith they so paint their bodies, and Deere skinnes which they weare about them, that with water it neither fadeth away, nor altereth colour. Golde and silver they want not: for at the Frenchmens first comming thither they had the same offered them for little or nothing, for they received for a hatchet two pound weight of golde, because they knew not the estimation thereof: but the souldiers, being greedy of the same, did take it from them, giving them nothing for it: the which they perceiving, that both the Frenchmen did greatly esteeme it, and also did rigorously deale with them, by taking the same away from them, at last would not be knowen they had any more, neither durst they weare the same for feare of being taken away: so that saving at their first comming, they could get none of them: and how they came by this golde and silver the French men know not as yet, but by gesse, who having travelled to the Southwest of the cape, having found the same dangerous, by means of sundry banks, as we also have found the same: and there finding masts which were wracks of Spaniards comming from Mexico, judged that they had gotten treasure by them. For it is most true that divers wracks have beene made of Spaniards, having much treasure: for the Frenchmen having travelled to the capeward an hundred and fiftie miles, did finde two Spanyards with the Floridians, which they brought afterward to their fort, whereof one was in a caravel comming from the Indies, which was cast away fourteene yeeres ago, and the other twelve yeeres; of whose fellowes some escaped, othersome were slain by the inhabitants. It seemeth they had estimation of their golde and silver, for it is wrought fiat and graven, which they weare about their neckes; othersome made round like a pancake, with a hole in the midst, to bolster up their breasts withall, because they thinke it a deformity to have great

breasts. As for mines either of gold or silver, the Frenchmen can heare of none they have upon the Island, but of copper, whereof as yet also they have not made the prooffe, because they were but few men: but it is not unlike, but that in the maine where are high hilles, may be golde and silver as well as in Mexico, because it is all one maine. The Frenchmen obtained pearles of them of great bignesse, but they were blacke, by meanes of roasting of them, for they do not fish for them as the Spanyards doe, but for their meat: for the Spanyards use to keepe dayly afishing some two or three hundred Indians, some of them that be of choise a thousand: and their order is to go in canoas, or rather great pinnesses, with thirty men in a piece, whereof the one halfe, or most part be divers, the rest doe open the same for the pearles: for it is not suffered that they should use dragging, for that would bring them out of estimation, and marre the beds of them. The oysters which have the smallest sort of pearles are found in seven or eight fadome water, but the greatest in eleven or twelve fadome.

The Floridians have pieces of unicornes hornes which they weare about their necks, whereof the Frenchmen obtained many pieces. Of those unicornes they have many: for that they doe affirme it to be a beast with one horne, which comming to the river to drinke, putteth the same into the water before he drinketh. Of this unicornes horne there are of our company, that having gotten the same of the Frenchmen brought home thereof to shew. It is therefore to be presupposed that there are more commodities as well as that, which for want of time, and people sufficient to inhabit the same, can not yet come to light: but I trust God will reveale the same before it be long, to the great profit of them that shal take it in hand. Of beasts in this country besides deere, foxes, hares, polcats, conies, ownces, and leopards, I am not able certainly to say: but it is thought that there are lions and tygres as well as unicornes; lions especially; if it be true that is sayd, of the enmity betweene them and the unicornes; for there is no beast but hath his enemy, as the cony the polcat, a sheepe the wolfe, the elephant the rinoceros; and so of other beasts the like: insomuch, that whereas the one is, the other can not be missing. And seeing I have made mention of the beasts of this country, it shall not be from my purpose to speake also of the venimous beasts, as crocodiles, whereof there is great abundance, adders of great bignesse, whereof our men killed some of a yard and halfe long. Also I heard a miracle of one of these adders, upon the which a faulcon seizing, the sayd adder did claspe her tail about her; which the French captaine seeing, came to the rescue of the falcon, and tooke her slaying the adder; and this faulcon being wilde, he did reclaim her, and kept her for the space of two moneths, at which time for very want of meat he was faine to cast her off. On these adders the Frenchmen did feed, to no little admiration of us, and affirmed the same to be a delicate meat. And the captaine of the Frenchmen saw also a serpent with three heads and foure feet, of the bignesse of a great spaniell, which for want of a harquebuz he durst not attempt to slay. Of fish also they have in the river, pike, roch, salmon, trout, and divers other small fishes, and of great fish, some of the length of a man and longer, being of bignesse accordingly, having a snout much like a sword of a yard long. There be also of sea fishes, which we saw coming along the coast flying, which are of the bignesse of a smelt, the biggest sort whereof have foure wings, but the other have but two: of these wee sawe comming out of Guinea a hundred in a company, which being chased by the gilt heads, otherwise called the bonitos, do to avoid them the better, take their flight out of the water, but yet are they not able to fly farre, because of the drying of their wings, which serve them not to flie but when they are moist, and therefore when they can flie no further, they fall into the water, and having wet their wings, take a new flight againe. These bonitos be of bignesse like a carpe, and in colour like a makarell, but it is the swiftest fish in swimming that is, and followeth her prey very fiercely, not only in the

water, but also out of the water: for as the flying fish taketh her flight, so doeth this bonito leape after them, and taketh them sometimes above the water. There were some of those bonitos, which being galled by a fishgig, did follow our shippe comming out of Guinea 500 leagues. There is a sea-fowle also that chaseth this flying fish aswell as the bonito: for as the flying fish taketh her flight, so doth this fowle pursue to take her, which to beholde is a greater pleasure then hawking, for both the flights are as pleasant, and also more often then an hundred times: for the fowle can flie no way, but one or other lighteth in her pawes, the number of them are so abundant. There is an innumerable yong frie of these flying fishes, which commonly keepe about the ship, and are not so big as butter-flies, and yet by flying do avoid the unsatiableness of the bonito. Of the bigger sort of these fishes wee tooke many, which both night and day flew into the sailes of our ship, and there was not one of them which was not woorth a bonito: for being put upon a hooke drabbling in the water, the bonito would leape thereat, and so was taken. Also, we tooke many with a white cloth made fast to a hooke, which being tied so short in the water, that it might leape out and in, the greedie bonito thinking it to be a flying fish leapeth thereat, and so is deceived. We tooke also dolphins which are of very goodly colour and proportion to behold, and no less delicate in taste. Fowles also there be many, both upon land and upon sea: but concerning them on the land I am not able to name them, because my abode was there so short. But for the fowle of the fresh rivers, these two I noted to be the chiefe, whereof the Flemengo is one, having all red feathers, and long red legs like a herne, a necke according to the bill, red, whereof the upper neb hangeth an inch over the nether; and an egypt [egret], which is all white as the swanne, with legs like to an hearn-shaw, and of bignesse accordingly, but it hath in her taile feathers of so fine a plume, that it passeth the estridge his feather. Of the sea-fowle above all other not common in England, I noted the pellicane, which is fained to be the lovingst bird that is; which rather then her yong should want, wil spare her heart bloud out of her belly: but for all this lovingnesse she is very deformed to beholde; for she is of colour russet: notwithstanding in Guinea I have seene of them as white as a swan, having legs like the same, and a body like a hearne, with a long necke, and a thick long beak, from the nether jaw whereof downe to the breast passeth a skinne of such a bignesse, as is able to receive a fish as big as ones thigh, and this her big throat and long bill doeth make her seem so ugly.

Here I have declared the estate of Florida, and the commodities therein to this day knowen, which although it may seeme unto some, by the meanes that the plenty of golde and silver, is not so abundant as in other places, that the cost bestowed upon the same will not be able to quit the charges: yet am I of the opinion, that by that which I have seene in other Islands of the Indians, where such increase of cattell hath bene, that of twelve head of beasts in five and twenty yeeres, did in the hides of them raise a thousand pound profit yerely, that the increase of cattel only would raise profit sufficient for the same: for wee may consider, if so small a portion did raise so much gaines in such short time, what would a greater do in many yeres? and surely I may this affirme, that the ground of the Indians for the breed of cattell, is not in any point to be compared to this of Florida, which all the yeere long is so greene, as any time in the Summer with us: which surely is not to be marvelled at, seeing the countrey standeth in so watery a climate: for once a day without faile they have a shower of raine; which by meanes of the countrey it selfe, which is drie, and more fervent hot then ours, doeth make all things to flourish therein. And because there is not the thing, we all seeke for, being rather desirous of present gaines, I doe therefore affirme the attempt thereof to be more requisit for a prince, who is of power able to go thorow with the same, rather then for any subject.

