

A Communication: Aurelio Tio to Charles W. Arnade

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Mr. Charles W. Arnade
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Dear Mr. Arnade:

I have just read your very interesting article on Juan Ponce de León in "Tequesta" (No. XXVII—1967) and I wish to congratulate you on your fine condensation of the biographical research on his life by various authors.

There are a few odds and ends that I wish to stress regarding your article on this interesting historical figure. Juan Ponce de León wrote in his own blood from 1513 to 1521, the very first pages of the history of the United States of America in the peninsula of Florida. In this last year he commanded many young stalwarts born in Puerto Rico of Spanish or Spanish-Indian extraction, who gave their blood or lives in this first attempt to develop what is now the continental United States. They were the first American pioneers.

On page 33 in your fine article you state correctly that Ponce de León was "the official discoverer of both places... Puerto Rico and Florida"... "this is an undisputed fact." However, you express some doubt that he came to America in the second discovery voyage in 1493, stating "Tío, although he shows little interest in this matter, is also emotionally inclined to accept the 1493 journey to America" (page 45) and also "Tío makes confusing deductions to which he is strongly devoted" (page 36).

When I have had to suppose or deduct something I have so stated, but I have tried my best to base such inferences on facts, as in this case. You will find on pages 331-336-341-357-361-397-403 (“Nuevas Fuentes para la Historia de Puerto Rico”) transcriptions of sworn statements which state that Ponce de León came with Columbus at the discovery of Puerto Rico, which had to be in the second journey in 1493. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, who “knew him personally very well” also attested to that fact, as well as his grandson Juan Troche Ponce de León, Governor of Puerto Rico and Trinidad. He wrote that his grandfather was a discoverer of Puerto Rico: “el descubridor y conquistador desta ysla fue Juan Ponce de Leon... la primera vez que vino al dicho efecto tomo puerto en una punta desta ysla que llaman el Aguada”. Since he well knew Columbus had been the main discoverer, it is clear that his mention of his grandfather as a discoverer was limited to Puerto Rico, naming correctly the first landing place on the island, “la aguada”.

As to Ponce de León’s age, so stated on September 28, 1514, I indicated the document where that fact was sworn to by himself, on page 184 (“Nuevas Fuentes”) (Archivo General de Indias—Indiferentes 1202). I am enclosing a copy of said document which I did not deem necessary to copy in its entirety since the statement contains only a casual reference to his age, sworn to by himself. You may translate and publish it if you consider it important to do so since it is a definite proof as to his age.

When I wrote, in September 1954, that I “had the good fortune to find the key that *permits* us to solve the mystery” of Ponce de León’s origins in Spain, I did so because it was the first lucky break in said research. Sometime after that find, I was fortunate to locate another revealing document, published as No. 14 on page 519 of “Nuevas Fuentes”, in which he is recognized as cousin of Francisca Ponce de León, Marquesa de Cádiz, which document made necessary a correction of Ponce de León’s previously assumed ancestry, duly made in “Nuevas Fuentes” right at the beginning of Appendix III on page 532.

You state that Monseñor Vicente Murga Sanz, Manuel Ballesteros Gai-brois and myself chose to ignore each other, or were unaware of each other’s work in this matter, and you have noted in your article on “the boom in studies about Ponce de León”. It so happens that they took place about the same time. My “Nuevas Fuentes” manuscript was at the publisher’s

since 1958, while Murga Sanz's Ponce de León was distributed in 1960, Ballesteros' in 1961 and "Nuevas Fuentes" in 1962. In my 1954 book on San Germán, printed in 1956, I published the identity of Ponce de León's Spanish wife for the first time (pages 88 and 215), while Murga Sanz was deducting that she was Indian, because he was unable to find her name in any document. Such a discrepancy implies that we had been working independently, in fact, I had not yet met Father Murga Sanz at the time.

While you rightly state that I made, by a process of elimination, Juan Ponce de León the son of Francisca (3) and Luis (6) in my 1956 book, you fail to mention that I corrected that deduction in my 1961 book, transcribing the complete April 8, 1518 document which proved that Juan Ponce de León was a cousin to Francisca (3), and that the evidence tends to show he was a brother to Luis Ponce de León (6). Murga Sanz quoted in part and referred to the same document, and asserted that Luis Ponce de León (6) died in 1494 instead of the correct date of 1528, of which I gave proof.

On page 36 you state, "Tió makes confusing deductions to which he is strongly devoted". However, Murga Sanz makes Juan Ponce de León a son of Count Juan Ponce de León (1) in the same pages he says he was his illegitimate grandson, and asserted his wife was an Indian woman because he had not been able to find her name in any document. On page 36 you present Murga Sanz' "scholarly Ponce de León biography" that "shows more depth and clarity than that of Tió", although recognizing on page 38 that it "fails come to such specifics".

I fail to understand the reason for this discrepancy in your own judgement, since you refer to my "1961 detailed study" where I reproduce "nearly verbatim" its previous results. However, you state that it was "most probably because of Murga Sanz study, which *he (Tió) does not acknowledge*", that I decided Ponce de León was Francisca Ponce de León's cousin and Luis Ponce de León's brother. In my 1961 book I reproduced complete and *verbatim* the document where that fact was stated, so I consider it unjust to state that I failed to acknowledge some information yet unknown to me, since my book was at the publisher's at the time Murga Sanz' book came out, It would have been easy for you to compare both versions and attest to the fact that I reproduced the entire document, while Murga Sanz only quoted from it very sparingly, yet you assert it was "discovered by the same Murga Sanz" (page 39).

You state in your article that “Murga Sanz claim is rather a riddle”, (page 39), and due to “the Murga Sanz conjectures” (page 41) “it is now more conceivable etc.”, which indicates that it was a riddle to you the “profound, deep and clear” Murga Sanz book also.

It is apparent from your article that you consider that Murga Sanz and myself knowingly competed in our research, and that therefore we were rivals at the time, but it is a fact we had not met until after publication of our studies on Ponce de León. I have a great admiration for his research, his dedication and his insight, and I have so stated in my books, so that such supposed “rivalry” could not possibly influence our different interpretations.

I am flattered by your article, but I have wished to clear up certain points which may convey an erroneous impression to some readers about my original research, directly from the rich archives in Spain.

Cordially yours,

/S/ AURELIO TIO

AT/srr