

# Pocahontas tale's source may have been Spaniard

## *Historians think Smith co-opted story*

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PENSACOLA, Fla. — When the Indian chief ordered the execution of a European captive, the chief's daughter persuaded him to spare the white man's life.

Does that sound like the story of Captain John Smith, the Jamestown colonist, now being retold in the popular Walt Disney movie "Pocahontas"?

Actually, it happened in Florida nearly 80 years before Smith set foot in Virginia. The European was Spaniard Juan Ortiz, and the Indian maiden was known as Ulele.

Many historians doubt that young Pocahontas ever saved Smith's life, and some contend the Englishman probably made up the story after reading previously published accounts of Ortiz's ordeal.

Not until after Pocahontas died in 1617 did the story show up in a revised account of Smith's adventures. Some historians dismiss Smith as a braggart and self-promoter. One biography is titled "The Great Rogue."

"It's something nobody can prove one way or the other," said historian William Coker. "But on the other hand, the evidence, I think, leans pretty heavily in favor of him borrowing the story."

In 1528, Timucua Indians captured Ortiz and three other Spaniards who were searching for missing explorer Panfillo de Narvaez near Tampa Bay.

"The first thing they did was . . . use them for target practice," said Mr. Coker, an emeritus professor of history at the University of West Florida. Three of the Spaniards were

killed by arrows but Ortiz survived, he said.

Hirrihugua, chief of the Ucita village, had a score to settle with the Spanish because Narvaez had cut off the chief's nose and killed his mother by throwing her to a pack of dogs.

The chief saved Ortiz for a special torture called "barbacoa," a word that survives as "barbecue."

Ortiz was strung up over a fire to be roasted alive, but Ulele pleaded with her father to spare his life. The chief's wife joined in the appeal, and he relented.

But the chief again threatened to have Ortiz killed. Before his sentence could be carried out, Ulele helped Ortiz escape to the village of a neighboring chief, Mocoso.

Ortiz lived there in relative peace until he encountered Hernando de Soto's expedition 11 years later. Ortiz, covered with tattoos as was the Timucuan custom, joined the Spaniards as an interpreter. He and de Soto both died during the winter of 1541-1542 near the Mississippi River.

A de Soto survivor known as the Gentleman of Elvas included the Ortiz rescue in his account of the expedition published in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1557. An English translation was printed about 1605. A Spanish account by Garcilasco de la Vega appeared in 1601.

"Lisbon and London were on good terms," Mr. Coker said.

"There's no question in my mind that copies of the book in Portuguese, Spanish and English were in London early on and early enough for Smith to have made a thorough study of them."