



**Excavations on the Franciscan Frontier:
Archaeology at the Fig Springs Mission (Florida
Museum of Natural History: Ripley P. Bullen
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Brent R. Weisman

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"*Excavations on the Franciscan Frontier* offers new perspectives on a little-known aspect of seventeenth-century La Florida, the western Timucuan-Franciscan mission frontier. Weisman's book illuminates both mission organization and the material culture of American Indians and Spaniards of interior northern Florida during this period."--Kathleen A. Deagan, and author of *Artifacts of Spanish Colonies*

In 1949, tantalizing discoveries of Spanish and Indian artifacts in the waters of Fig Springs in North Florida hinted at the location of an early seventeenth-century mission site. Forty years later, archaeologists returned to the area to search out and excavate the mission. Weisman's account of this search is an adventure in field archaeology and discovery, and he provides the first detailed description of an aboriginal habitation associated with an early Spanish mission.

While many mission sites have been excavated in the colonial capital of St. Augustine and in the populous Apalachee Province near present-day Tallahassee, few detailed excavations have been carried out in the frontier province of Timucua, an early setting for the Franciscan effort to bring Christianity to Florida's native peoples. Still fewer excavations have concentrated on the village areas of the mission community.

The dig at Fig Springs has revealed remarkably intact remains of several mission buildings as well as thousands of artifacts in and around the buildings found as they were left when the mission was abandoned in the mid-seventeenth century. Most important, Weisman shows, the artifacts, architecture, and community plan from this site demonstrate how mission culture evolved well beyond the religious dimension and combined traits of both European and aboriginal cultures. The well-preserved artifacts of activities such as cooking, tool making, house building, and trash disposal represent a tremendous archaeological resource for understanding the aboriginal experience of mission life--an experience not often mentioned in contemporary documentary sources. The richness of the site augments the traditional focus of research into the Florida mission period and helps to provide a more complete picture of the mission community as a whole.

Brent Richards Weisman is an archaeologist with the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research in Tallahassee and is the author of *Like Beads on a String: A Culture History of The Seminole Indians in Northern Peninsular Florida*.

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