

**Exploration and Trade in the Deep Frontier of Spanish Florida:  
Possible Sources for 16th-Century Spanish Artifacts in Western North Carolina**

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**Abstract**

Recent archaeological investigations in western North Carolina have revealed the presence of 16th-century Spanish artifacts in association with contemporaneous aboriginal occupation. This paper examines the available Spanish historical evidence regarding the various mechanisms by which such items may have been disseminated among aboriginal populations in the deep interior Southeast. Possible sources include direct or indirect contact with the well-known Hernando de Soto or Juan Pardo expeditions between 1540 and 1568, dispersal as a result of several minor Spanish entradas into the northern interior between 1597 and 1628, and ongoing long-distance trade with aboriginal and Spanish populations along the Atlantic coastline.

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The recent identification of a variety of 16th-century Spanish artifacts at the Berry site in western North Carolina provides tantalizing evidence for some form of direct or indirect contact between Spanish explorers or colonists and aboriginal groups living in the deep frontier of Spanish Florida. Although rare, Spanish artifacts dating to this period have nevertheless previously been found in a number of contemporaneous aboriginal sites in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, making the finds at the Berry site only the most recent discovery in this region of the Appalachian highlands. The nature of the Spanish artifact assemblage at the Berry site, however, seems to be largely unique for this region, prompting questions as to the origin of these so-called "trade goods." Sixteenth-century Spanish artifacts identified to date at the Berry site include an iron knife recovered from an aboriginal burial, a blue glass bead, a rolled brass bead, nearly a dozen sherds of Spanish ceramics, a lump of molten lead shot, and a forged iron nail (Moore and Beck 1994). As I will discuss in this paper, an examination of Spanish documentary sources dating to the 16th and early 17th centuries, combined with a comparison with other assemblages of Spanish artifacts from this region of the Appalachian highlands, strongly suggests that most of the Berry site assemblage was not the result of direct or indirect trade with Spanish sources, but rather was the result of a short-term occupation of the Berry site by Spanish soldiers during the late 16th century. Specifically, based on the written accounts of the Juan Pardo expeditions of 1566-1568, the Berry site may be tentatively identified as the capital town of the late 16th-century aboriginal chiefdom of Joara, and thus the site of Fort San Juan, the first Spanish military fortification constructed in the deep interior of the southeastern United States.

The presence of 16th-century Spanish artifacts within the archaeological context of contemporaneous aboriginal villages in the interior Southeast can be explained by several mechanisms. Such artifacts may be broken down into two broad categories--trade goods and

occupation debris. Specifically, these artifacts were either exchanged with or given to Indians by Spaniards (either as a result of direct or indirect contact), or they represent debris left by Spaniards as a result of temporary occupation within or adjacent to established Indian settlements. Although many artifacts in this second category were undoubtedly scavenged and re-used by Indians in the interior after their deposition at a site, the functional distinction between these two categories of artifacts relates more to the original intended function of these artifacts, and not to their eventual fate in the archaeological record.

In this connection, it is instructive to review the historical and archaeological evidence for both late 16th-century trade and occupation in western North Carolina resulting from the contemporary Spanish colonial presence to the south. Only two Spanish exploratory expeditions ever reached the deep northern interior region now known as western North Carolina, and these therefore represent the only possibility of direct, or face-to-face, trade between 16th-century Spaniards and aboriginal groups in this area. The first of these expeditions was that of Hernando de Soto, whose 600-man army swung eastward and northward from the Gulf coast region of present-day Florida to make contact with several powerful and populous aboriginal chiefdoms in the Carolinas during 1540 (see Hudson et al. 1984). The second and last expedition to reach this area was that of Juan Pardo, who set out twice from the newly-established Spanish colonial town of Santa Elena (on modern Parris Island), ultimately retracing portions of Soto's earlier route into the northern interior between 1566 and 1568 (see Hudson 1990).

Now, inasmuch as a precise and accurate reconstruction of the actual route of Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo is pivotal in understanding the possible origin of Spanish artifacts at the Berry site, I will first discuss recently identified--and what I believe to be conclusive--documentary proof that the Berry site was actually situated along the general track of the routes of both Soto and

Pardo, and thus may have been visited by the members of both expeditions. The Soto and Pardo routes have been and continue to be the subject of considerable controversy. Despite the conclusions reached by the United States DeSoto Commission in the 1930s (Swanton 1939), recent research by Charles Hudson, Chester DePratter, and Marvin Smith, in concert with investigations by a number of other scholars across the Southeast, has resulted in a substantially revised reconstruction of the Soto and Pardo routes (Hudson et al. 1984). While the specific details of their evidence will not be reviewed here, it is important to note that what may be referred to as the Hudson route is based on the combined use of modern archaeological data on the geographic distribution of mid-16th-century archaeological sites and a detailed evaluation of all available primary historical sources regarding these expeditions.

Much of the eastern portion of the 1540 Soto route was later retraced by the Juan Pardo expeditions, which are somewhat better documented with respect to individual town locations. It is this fact that helped Hudson and his colleagues initially revise the route of the earlier Hernando de Soto expedition, which visited several of the same towns documented during the Pardo expeditions (see discussion by Hudson et al. 1984). Specifically, the most detailed of the four contemporary accounts of the Pardo expeditions, written by notary Juan de la Bandera, helped demonstrate that the location of the important chiefdom of Cofitachequi (also known as Canos), and thus the river corridor taken by Soto and Pardo northward toward the Appalachian summit, was not on the Savannah River between Georgia and South Carolina, but instead along the Wateree River in central South Carolina.

Despite a considerable amount of evidence supporting this revised route, including archaeological data indicating that the middle Savannah River was largely uninhabited during the 16th century, there remains some controversy over the Wateree River location for Cofitachequi.

Since the Berry site is situated along the Hudson route, and far to the east of the Savannah River route, interpretations regarding the origin of Spanish artifacts at the Berry site hinge upon which route is correct. Fortunately, new documentary evidence has recently come to light which strongly supports the Hudson route.

Four major documentary accounts describing the Hernando de Soto expedition have been utilized in the past for reconstructing Soto's route, including a relation written by the King's factor Luys Hernández de Biedma, Oviedo's summary of the diary of de Soto's private secretary Rodrigo Ranjel, an anonymous Portuguese account written by a participant in the expedition, and a secondary account compiled at a much later date by Garcilaso de la Vega (translations in Clayton et al. 1993). Another four major documentary accounts relative to the later Juan Pardo expeditions have been employed for reconstructing Pardo's route. These include an overview written by Juan Pardo himself, a letter written by soldier Francisco Martínez and witnessed by several other soldiers on the expedition, and two accounts by Pardo's notary Juan de la Bandera--one representing the day by day affairs of Pardo's second expedition, and a summary based on this relation (translations in Hudson 1990).

More recently, I have identified yet another account of the Juan Pardo expeditions, written in 1584 by soldier, notary, and interpreter Domingo de León, who not only participated in the Pardo expeditions but also served as an important interpreter with the Indians around Santa Elena during the years following the entradas (Worth n.d.). The León account represents a recollection penned some 16 years after the fact, but contains a variety of details not mentioned in other accounts of the Pardo expeditions, including the fate of some of its other participants and survivors. Indeed, the fact that Domingo de León incorporated not only the details of his own personal experience in the interior, but also information gleaned from Indians around Santa Elena,

apparently in contact with groups in the interior, makes his account unique among all extant accounts in the sense that León provided a broad overview of the physical and social geography of the Carolina interior during the late 16th century. No other account, including those relative to the Soto expedition, provides such a revealingly broad overview of the locations of 16th-century aboriginal chiefdoms in the interior of the Carolinas with respect to major river drainages and mountain ranges. In several instances, León's insightful comments regarding settlement distributions and sociopolitical relationships provide tantalizing clues that archaeologists could pursue for years to come.

While I do not wish to overstate the importance of the León account, it is important to discuss here the implications of his description of the interior regarding the general route of Juan Pardo into the interior. Specifically, a detailed examination of the text of Domingo de León's account makes it possible to extrapolate a sort of "mental map" of the interior, representing León's understanding of the physical and social geography of the regions traversed by Pardo, focusing on the region of Canos, or Cofitachequi. Closer examination of the map derived from León's textual account reveals considerable information regarding the location of the town and province called Canos with respect to the river system on which it was situated, and with respect to other physical and social features of the interior landscape. León describes Canos, or Cofitachequi, as being 40 leagues north of Santa Elena. Furthermore, he locates Canos on a river system that comprised two major branches that joined 30 leagues inland from the sea. An unnamed town at the junction of these rivers marked the beginning of population along the northwestern branch of the river, and towns were spaced at between half a league and a league apart. Canos was said to be 12 leagues upriver from this first town, and comprised a district stretching for 20 leagues in which the towns were more closely spaced, and on the eastern bank of the river. Farther into the interior along this

northwestern river, yet another cacique was said to be located at the foot of the mountains, and the settlements of this populus province were said to be more dispersed as a result of warfare.

Interestingly, León's description of the western branch of this river system seems more fanciful in retrospect, since León noted that although it was not populated along its lower reaches, his Indian informants attested to the existence of a large, long lake at the river's source, supposedly well-populated. This area was known as the "River of the Shells." On the other side of the mountains, estimated to be 50 leagues away, was said to be yet another large, populated lake, this time round in shape, from which a tremendous river ran toward the west. Examination of León's text and "mental map" makes it clear that he had never personally visited these mythical regions, in contrast to his more detailed description of the northwestern branch where Canos was located. Other evidence in the León account suggests that he may have been stationed at Pardo's first fort named San Juan, located in the town of Joara, and thus never crossed the mountains to the west.

Significantly, León's description of these river systems and the aboriginal chiefdoms on them corresponds remarkably well to the Pardo route reconstructed by Charles Hudson and his colleagues. Indeed, the similarity between Hudson's map, constructed without the benefit of the León account, and Domingo de León's "mental map," is uncanny. The locations of river systems, population centers, and even the locations of uninhabited stretches of major rivers, match all other historical and archaeological data regarding the interior of 16th-century South Carolina. What is perhaps most telling, however, is a further comparison of the river system described by Domingo de León, with its two major branches 30 leagues from the coast (both of which reached to the mountains), with the course of the Savannah River, long argued to be the site of Cofitachequi. The Savannah lacks any major branches so close to the coast, and none of the feeder creeks along the western bank of the river extend even close to the mountains.

Consequently, I believe the newly-discovered Domingo de León account to represent substantial proof for Charles Hudson's reconstruction of Juan Pardo's route, and thus also for his Hernando de Soto route. There is effectively no reasonable way to fit a Savannah River location for Pardo's Canos and Soto's Cofitachequi into León's description of the regions he viewed. Unless the León account is dismissed outright (which would be difficult to justify, considering his lengthy record of service as a trusted and able interpreter among the Carolina Indians), the general course of the Hudson reconstruction of Pardo's route must be concluded to be accurate.

Now, given that the Hudson's reconstruction of Juan Pardo's route is accurate in its general course, we may conclude that the expeditions of both Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo passed very close to the Berry site. Indeed, the Berry site is only 20 miles from Hudson's predicted location of the important interior capital town of Joara, visited by both the Soto and Pardo expeditions (Hudson 1990). This aboriginal town was the site of Fort San Juan, the first and most important of a string of Spanish fortifications constructed and manned by Pardo's soldiers during his two expeditions. Consequently, the inhabitants of the Berry site had several opportunities for face-to-face contact with Spanish soldiers between 1540 and 1568, making it at least possible that some of the Spanish artifacts found there resulted from direct trade or gift-giving, and even as a result of short-term Spanish occupation at Fort San Juan.

Since the Juan Pardo expeditions are more well-documented with respect to trade goods distributed, and since the late 16th-century date of several of the artifacts at the Berry site correspond with this later expedition, it is informative to review the Spanish artifacts known to have been distributed in the deep interior during Pardo's journey. Trade goods appearing on Pardo's official records as having been given away to Indian leaders include the following items: 35 iron axes, 126 iron chisels and wedges, 32 iron knives, 29 bead necklaces, 6 mirrors, several gilded



buttons, and an assortment of pieces of Spanish cloth (Hudson 1990: 134-38). In the town of Joara itself, the aboriginal leader Joara Mico was noted to have been given a small battle axe and another axe, and 8 "long wedges like chisels" and 8 large knives for him and other caciques subject to him (Hudson 1990: 265).

Of these items, at least three of the Spanish artifacts in the Berry site assemblage correspond directly to the list of trade goods distributed in the interior, namely the blue glass bead, the rolled brass bead, and the iron knife found buried with a member of Joara's aboriginal elite. Indeed, the iron knife could easily be one of the knives distributed to a cacique subject to Joara Mico, who was subsequently interred with the gift. None of the other items found at the Berry site, however, match any of the categories of objects known to have been distributed as gifts or trade goods. In this sense, the Berry site departs from other contemporaneous assemblages of Spanish artifacts in western North Carolina, in that other sites have generally produced what might be considered typical "trade goods," including principally glass beads and iron tools (i.e. Rogers and Brown 1994). Items such as those listed for the Pardo expeditions, along with brass bells probably specific to the Soto expedition, effectively match Marvin Smith's (1987) list of trade goods generally associated with early to mid-16th century archaeological contexts in the interior Southeast, suggesting that early Spanish exploratory expeditions generally carried a similar range of objects for use in direct trade or gift-giving.

An examination of documentary and archaeological evidence for long-distance trade in the late 16th and early 17th centuries suggests that although indirect trade might also be responsible for the iron knife and beads found at the Berry site, this mechanism cannot reasonably explain the other items either. The long-distance exchange networks among aboriginal leaders or groups during this period undoubtedly resulted in the dispersal of items of Spanish manufacture far beyond

their original source, and in the absence of face-to-face contact between Spaniards and Indians. Spaniards did enter the interior after the Pardo expeditions, and trade goods may have entered exchange networks during such episodes. Nevertheless, for the period immediately following the Pardo expeditions, I have been able to document only seven small military exploratory expeditions which penetrated relatively short distances into the northern interior between 1597 and 1628, and only the final of these pushed even as far north as Cofitachequi (Worth 1994). Trade goods carried during these expeditions were limited in number, but definitely included blankets, knives, fish-hooks, scissors, glass beads, sickles, axes, and chisels. Other items listed as planned trade goods for interior expeditions during this period included hoes and mirrors. However, even if trade goods or supplies from these minor entradas did manage to reach the Berry site, accounting for the knife, the beads, and perhaps even the lead shot, there is still no way to effectively account for the Spanish ceramics or the forged iron nail.

The only remaining avenue for such indirect trade would be an extremely long-distance trade system originating either in Santa Elena or St. Augustine during the late 16th century, or in the 17th-century Spanish mission provinces west and north of St. Augustine. The deep interior town of Joara was indeed involved in long-distance aboriginal trade, for in 1605, two Cayagua Indians from coastal South Carolina made mention of Joara in this context, noting it to be thirty days into the interior (Hann 1986). Marvin Smith (1987) and Gregory Waselkov (1989) have compiled archaeological evidence for the existence of such an interior trade network during the late 16th and 17th centuries, involving trade goods such as glass beads, iron chisels, wedges, spikes, hoes, and eyed axes, brass bells, and a wide assortment of sheet brass ornaments such as conical bangles, disc gorgets, collars, armbands, and animal effigies. This trade network seems to have been specifically directed toward the regions far to the west of the Berry site, however, across

northern Alabama and eastern Tennessee. Nevertheless, while the Spanish knife and beads recovered at the Berry site fall within the range of items involved in such long-distance trade, there is no hint that Spanish ceramics, lead shot, or iron nails ever entered into such a trade network, effectively eliminating such indirect trade as a probable mechanism by which these items arrived at the Berry site.

Since neither direct nor indirect trade seems a likely explanation for a number of Spanish items found at the Berry site, we must examine the possibility that such objects represent occupational debris. While the Soto expedition only stayed in Xuala over a single weekend, members of the Pardo expedition remained in Joara for many months. The list of general supplies known to have been brought into the interior by Juan Pardo for the use of his troops includes the following: 639 pounds of gunpowder, 428 pounds of matchcord, 502 pounds of lead shot, 2 iron picks, 7 iron shovels, 5 maddocks, 5 crossbows with 240 bolts, 77 linen sacks, 178 pair of shoes, 265 pair of fiber sandals, 878 pounds of biscuit, 72 liters of wine, and 10 cheeses (Hudson 1990). This list, of course, does not include weapons and personal gear carried by each soldier. Importantly, it should be noted that this list of supplies does not mention containers used for items such as gunpowder and wine. Powder was probably carried in small wooden barrels or kegs, and the wine was most likely carried in the ceramic containers typically used by colonial Spaniards for storage and transport, known as botijas at the time, and more commonly referred to as "olive jars" by modern archaeologists.

Given that the Berry site is in the immediate vicinity of Hudson's predicted location for Juan Pardo's town of Joara, a review of all the items of Spanish manufacture known to have been left specifically in Joara is also informative. During Pardo's first and second expeditions, Fort San Juan was provisioned a wide array of supplies. In addition to the weapons and equipment carried by

each soldier stationed at the fort, Pardo is known to have issued the following military supplies: 235 pounds of gunpowder, 201 pounds of matchcord for arquebuses, 235 pounds of lead shot, and 4 crossbows along with 240 crossbow bolts. A considerable amount of construction supplies were also issued, including 6 iron shovels, 4 mattocks, 4 picks, 42 chisels, 2 socketed axes, 4 iron wedges, and 34 pounds of nails (Hudson 1990: 148, 150).

Interestingly, and of considerable significance for the present paper, Fort San Juan at Joara is the only site in the interior specifically noted to have been left with a supply of nails during the Juan Pardo expeditions. Based on Juan de la Bandera's account, none of the other interior forts was left with nails, making Joara the principal location in the interior where archaeologists might expect to find 16th-century Spanish nails. This is not surprising, particularly considering the often extreme scarcity of forged iron nails in colonial Spanish Florida, even for Spaniards. Documentary references to the lack of nails in Florida are not uncommon, and the problem was emphasized in a 1630 letter by Fray Francisco Alonso de Jesús, who specifically petitioned the King of Spain for a supply of nails for the more remote Franciscan missions in Florida. Given, therefore, that Spaniards themselves frequently had difficulty obtaining supplies of iron nails, it is no wonder that such objects are never mentioned as items of trade with Indians.

It would therefore seem to be no coincidence that the Berry site is so close to the predicted location of the aboriginal town of Joara and its Fort San Juan. The recovery of an unmodified 16th-century forged iron nail at the Berry site is fortunately supplemented by 9 sherds from at least three and possibly four Spanish olive jars, 1 sherd of Caparra Blue Spanish majolica tableware, and a sherd of what seems to be a Spanish ceramic type referred to as "greyware," otherwise unique to the 16th-century town of Santa Elena from which Juan Pardo departed (Moore and Beck 1994). All of these objects together make a strong case for the tentative identification of the Berry site as

the location of Juan Pardo's Fort San Juan, and the important aboriginal town of Joara. The recovery of so many unmodified sherds of at least three distinct Spanish ceramic vessels used for transport and storage, and the fact that between 2 and 4 sherds were recovered from each vessel, strongly implies that these represent breakage as the result of a comparatively extended stay by Spaniards at the site. Indeed, these could be fragments of several of the botijas, or olive jars, used to carry the 72 liters of wine brought on the Pardo expeditions. The majolica may well be personal tableware used by soldiers stationed at the fort. The lead shot is easily explained as military supplies. The final piece of evidence is the forged iron nail, which provides a strong link not only with Pardo's chain of forts, but specifically with Joara and Fort San Juan, thus serving literally to nail down the argument.

In conclusion, the assemblage of 16th-century Spanish artifacts at the Berry site most likely has its origin in a combination of direct trade and short-term Spanish occupation at the site, both of which probably relate to the Juan Pardo expeditions of the late 1560s. A review of documentary evidence for trade goods and military supplies brought on the expedition indicates that the Berry site uniquely satisfies what would be expected at the site of Joara, standing alone among other contemporaneous assemblages in other sites in western North Carolina, which presumably reflect trade goods distributed to neighboring Indian leaders during the expedition. Nevertheless, further archaeological testing at the Berry site is clearly needed to test this proposition. Final proof would presumably come in the form of a small Spanish fortification located at the site, and if such a discovery is made, the Berry site will instantly become an extremely important archaeological site. Not only was Joara the site of the first Spanish military fortification constructed in the deep interior of the southeastern United States, but it was also the center of an emerging aboriginal chiefdom in western North Carolina, and its identification would provide archaeologists with a unique

opportunity to combine ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence in the examination of an indigenous society at the dawn of the European colonial era.

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