

# Afterword

## Pardo, Joara, and Fort San Juan Revisited

David G. Moore, Robin A. Beck Jr.,  
and Christopher B. Rodning

If the long time required to discover the site of Anhayca was discouraging, the recent discovery of what may be the site of Joara is encouraging. I, for one, had little hope that Joara would ever be found.

—Charles Hudson<sup>1</sup>

During the mid-1980s, Charles Hudson and his colleagues from the University of Georgia published a series of articles that changed how archaeologists and historians view the routes of the Spaniards Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo through the interior Southeast.<sup>2</sup> Although their research revived debate among scholars throughout the region traversed by these expeditions, in few areas did the reconstructions proposed by Hudson and his colleagues require as complete a re-drawing of earlier reconstruction efforts<sup>3</sup> as that of the south Appalachians and adjacent areas of the Piedmont. The differences between what have come to be referred to as the “Swanton Route” and the “Hudson Route” through this area hinged on whether De Soto and Pardo entered the Appalachians via the upper Savannah River (Swanton) or via the upper Catawba and its tributaries (Hudson).

As Hudson spearheaded the effort to reconstruct a more accurate route, archaeological research in the Savannah Valley<sup>4</sup> began to indicate an absence of well-populated, mid-sixteenth-century villages such as those described in the various accounts of the Spanish expeditions. Hence the Savannah Valley appeared to qualify as the *despoblado* between Ocute and Cofitachequi described in the De Soto documents. At this same time, the Catawba River Valley was virtually terra incognita, with archaeologists unable even to determine whether or not a Native American population occupied the valley in the mid-sixteenth century; identifying such sites as the native towns of Yssa, Guaquiri, and Joara seemed a remote possibility. It was toward the aim of testing Hudson’s Catawba Valley route and developing an understand-

ing of the valley's late prehistoric inhabitants that David Moore initiated excavations at the McDowell and Berry sites as part of his dissertation field research in 1986.<sup>5</sup>

Moore, at the time a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, was spurred on in his research both by Charles Hudson himself and by the late Roy Dickens. Hudson and his associates had earlier suggested that the McDowell Site (31MC41), located near modern Marion, North Carolina, was the town of Joara (De Soto's Xuala); it was at Joara, in January 1567, that Juan Pardo founded the garrison of Fort San Juan, the earliest European settlement in the interior of what is now the United States.<sup>6</sup> Joara and Fort San Juan played leading roles in the story of the Pardo expeditions, as the present volume makes clear. Hudson well understood that the discovery of their locations by archaeologists could provide a crucial linchpin for his redrawn map of the sixteenth-century Southeast. Moore thus intended to focus his project at the McDowell site, but—due to unforeseen circumstances—he actually spent more of his time at the Berry site (31BK22), located about 40 kilometers east of Marion near modern Morganton. As is so often the case in archaeological fieldwork, this seemingly unfortunate turn of events would eventually prove to be a boon. Moore did, in the end, conduct extensive excavations at both sites, and has recently published a synthesis of his dissertation research.<sup>7</sup> Although his excavations were unable to confirm that either McDowell or Berry was the location of Joara, he did demonstrate that both were large villages with earthen mounds, and that the upper Catawba Valley had a substantial late prehistoric population consistent with that described in the Spanish accounts.<sup>8</sup>

In 1994, two independently unfolding events sealed the general course of Hudson's Catawba Valley route and strongly suggested that Berry, not McDowell, was the location of Joara and Pardo's Fort San Juan. First, John Worth<sup>9</sup> discovered and translated an account by Domingo de León, one of the interpreters who accompanied Pardo on his second expedition. León's account provides a detailed description of the route traversed by Pardo and his company, a description that only matches a course set along the Catawba-Wateree River. Second, David Moore and Robin Beck reported on the discovery of sixteenth-century Spanish ceramics and hardware at the Berry site.<sup>10</sup> During surface reconnaissance of Berry in early 1994, Beck had discovered several shards of Spanish Olive Jar and a wrought iron nail near the area of Moore's 1986 excavations. Subsequently, Beck and Moore re-examined the collections from the 1986 project, identifying additional fragments of olive jar, as well as molten lead sprue; further visits to the site yielded more olive

jar and a single sherd of Caparra Blue majolica, the latter found in the New World at sites that date between 1492 and 1600. The assemblage of Spanish artifacts from the Berry site closely matches the list of supplies left for the soldiers stationed at Fort San Juan, as recorded by Pardo's scribe, Juan de la Bandera. The only other identified site in the interior Southeast with a similar assemblage of sixteenth-century Spanish artifacts is the Martin site in Tallahassee, Florida, location of De Soto's winter camp at Anhayca in 1539. Moore, Beck, and Worth identified Berry as the likely site of Joara and Fort San Juan, a location that fell within 40 kilometers of the site that Hudson and his colleagues had proposed in 1983.<sup>11</sup>

The identification of the Berry site as Joara led Beck to revisit the routes of De Soto and Pardo across the Appalachian Summit.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, if Berry was Joara, then the explorers likely crossed into the mountains by different routes, De Soto taking a northern course from Berry into the Nolichucky drainage and Pardo taking a western course into the French Broad drainage through the Swannanoa Gap. In 1996, as part of his Master's thesis at The University of Alabama, Beck conducted a systematic survey along Upper Creek-Warrior Fork, the tributary of the upper Catawba River on which the Berry site is located.<sup>13</sup> This survey identified five large villages or village pairs that appear to have been contemporaneous with Berry and that may represent the towns of the five *oratas*, or local headmen, known to have been under the authority of Joara Mico from 1567 to 1568, during the time that Pardo's men were at Joara.<sup>14</sup> Berry, which measures approximately five hectares (more than 12 acres), was twice the size of these other towns, suggesting that Joara Mico had forged a multicomunity polity—a chiefdom—by at least the mid-1500s. We feel that combining archaeological and documentary research in this manner is precisely what Hudson has demonstrated in tracing the routes of sixteenth-century Spanish expeditions across the Southeast. Hudson has considered route reconstructions as the beginning of the effort to map the social geography of the sixteenth-century Southeast, which can provide a cultural and historical baseline for looking backward into prehistory and forward into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In 1997, Beck, Moore, and the late Thomas Hargrove conducted a gradiometer survey of the Berry site that revealed evidence of at least four large, subsurface anomalies believed to represent the remains of burned buildings; subsequent auger testing confirmed the presence of burned materials in discrete areas corresponding to these anomalies.<sup>15</sup> In 2001, Moore, Beck, and Christopher Rodning (the latter a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) formed the Upper Catawba Archaeology

Project and resumed excavations at the Berry site as part of an effort to investigate the effects of interactions between Spanish expeditions and the native chiefdoms in the Catawba Valley. Our work at the Berry site has focused on burned buildings located in a small area at the northern end of the site that coincides with the distribution of Spanish artifacts. These buildings are thought to represent the remnants of Fort San Juan.<sup>16</sup> Our excavations here, from 2001 to 2003, have uncovered the well-preserved remains of these burned buildings; each measures between 65 and 80 m<sup>2</sup> and together they form a distinct compound around a possible central plaza. Large pit features in the plaza area contain abundant quantities of native materials and several glass beads and brass lacing tips, or aglets, from Spanish clothing. A line of large posts near one of the buildings suggests that a wooden stockade may have protected the compound.<sup>17</sup>

Our excavations inside one of the burned buildings, Structure 1, have revealed an exceptional degree of architectural preservation, including intact features such as carbonized wooden posts that still remain upright and fallen roof timbers that still retain their bark. We have found burned sections of wooden wall benches made of split oak, with split cane matting still attached to the benches. Artifacts inside the building are lying in place where they fell or were left on the day that Fort San Juan was destroyed. We discovered fragments of chain mail armor on the floor of the structure, and some of its wooden timbers seem to be notched with metal tools in a European style of construction. We believe, in sum, that this was one of the buildings that quartered Pardo's soldiers stationed at Fort San Juan.<sup>18</sup> Our excavations have shown that Structure 1 was built in a style that was typical of native buildings, but with specific elements of its construction that exhibit non-native, European techniques and technologies. Also, the chain mail links found at the site suggest that Spanish soldiers spent time inside the building before its destruction.

These are the details we would expect for soldiers' houses built during the Pardo expeditions: Pardo's men brought only those personal items that they could carry on their backs, and therefore most of their material possessions at Joara were likely native in origin. Also, while the documents record that Pardo commanded the native people of Joara to build such houses, it is reasonable to expect that the soldiers of the expedition participated in their construction. We have yet to expose the contents of the other buildings in this area, but we have every reason to believe that they are just as remarkable in the preservation of their architectural details. That all four were burned serves as a chilling testament to how relations between these Spaniards and

Native Americans ended tumultuously in the spring of 1568, when the people of Joara destroyed Fort San Juan.

The Berry site, therefore, provides an archaeological context that is unique in several respects. First, it likely contains the first European settlement in the interior of what is now the United States, as well as the earliest site of a sustained interaction between Europeans and native peoples (18 months) in the interior of North America. Second, it may be one of the only places along the various routes of early Spanish exploration that can be linked to a particular point on the landscape, and to a specific archaeological site. Third, if Berry does indeed contain the remains of Fort San Juan, then its burned buildings offer a window onto a single historical event: the fiery destruction of the fort and the end of Spanish colonial ambitions in northern La Florida. Fourth, documentary sources indicate that Joara was still a major town during the early years of the seventeenth century, and the Berry site thus gives us an opportunity to uncover the history of this native town not only during the 27 years between the De Soto and Pardo expeditions, but also for at least four decades after the fall of Fort San Juan. Further investigations at Berry and other protohistoric sites in the upper Catawba Valley and surrounding areas will shed new light on the social landscape of the southern Appalachians, on the nature of early Spanish expeditions and settlements in this part of the Southeast, and on the nature of cultural interactions between these Europeans and Mississippian peoples. Charles Hudson has studied all of these topics over the course of his remarkable career, and we hope that our continued work will meet the standard that he has set. His research is at the very heart of our project—it is the catalyst that brought us all to the Berry site—and his tenacity and passion inspire us to help illuminate this long-lost corner of the forgotten century.

### Notes

1. Charles M. Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997).
2. Chester B. DePratter, Hudson, and Marvin T. Smith, "The Route of Juan Pardo's Explorations in the Interior Southeast, 1566-1568," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 62(1983):125-58; Hudson, Smith, and DePratter, "The Hernando de Soto Expedition: From Apalachee to Chiaha," *Southeastern Archaeology* 3(1984):65-77; and Hudson, Smith, David Hally, Richard Polhemus, and DePratter, "Coosa: A Chiefdom in the Sixteenth Century Southeastern United States," *American Antiquity* 50(1985):723-37.
3. For example, John R. Swanton, Final Report of the United States De Soto Ex-

- pedition Commission (1939; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985).
4. For a synthesis of the archaeological work in the Savannah Valley, see David G. Anderson, *The Savannah River Chiefdoms: Political Change in the Late Prehistoric Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994).
  5. David G. Moore, *Catawba Valley Mississippian: Ceramics, Chronology, and Catawba Indians* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002).
  6. See DePratter, Hudson, and Smith, "The Route of Juan Pardo's Explorations," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 132; see also this volume.
  7. Moore, *Catawba Valley*.
  8. Janet E. Levy, J. Alan May, and Moore, "From Ysa to Joara: Cultural Diversity in the Catawba Valley from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century," in *Columbian Consequences, Volume 2: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands East*, edited by D. H. Thomas (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), pp. 152-68.
  9. John R. Worth, "Exploration and Trade in the Deep Frontier of Spanish Florida: Possible Sources for 16th-Century Spanish Artifacts in Western North Carolina" (Paper presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Lexington, Kentucky, 1994).
  10. Moore and Robin A. Beck Jr., "New Evidence of Sixteenth-Century Spanish Artifacts in the Catawba River Valley, North Carolina" (Paper presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference).
  11. Worth, "Exploration and Trade" and Moore and Beck, "New Evidence," both presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference.
  12. Beck, "From Joara to Chiaha: Spanish Exploration of the Appalachian Summit Area, 1540-1568," *Southeastern Archaeology* 16(2)(1997b):162-68.
  13. Beck, "The Burke Phase: Late Prehistoric Settlements in the Upper Catawba River Valley, North Carolina" (M.A. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, 1997a).
  14. Juan de la Bandera, "The Pardo Documents, transcribed and translated by Paul H. Hoffman," in Hudson, *The Juan Pardo Expeditions: Exploration of the Carolinas and Tennessee, 1566-1568* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990; Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), pp. 205-321; and Beck and Moore, "The Burke Phase: A Mississippian Frontier in the North Carolina Foothills." *Southeastern Archaeology* 21(2)(2002):192-205.
  15. Hargrove and Beck, "Magnetometer and Auger Testing at the Berry Site (31BK22), Burke County, North Carolina" (Paper presented at the 58th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2001).

16. Moore, Beck, and Christopher B. Rodning, "Joara and Fort San Juan: Culture Contact at the Edge of the World," *Antiquity* 78(299): March 2004; available at <http://antiquity.ac.uk/ProjGall/moore/>.
17. Megan S. Best and Rodning, "Mississippian Chiefdoms and the Spanish Frontier: An Overview of Recent Excavations at the Berry Site in Western North Carolina" (Paper presented at the 60th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Charlotte, North Carolina, 2003).
18. Beck and Caroline V. Ketron, "The Fall of Fort San Juan? Excavating a Burned Building at the Berry Site" (Paper presented at the 60th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Charlotte, North Carolina, 2003).

# The Juan Pardo Expeditions



Explorations of the Carolinas and  
Tennessee, 1566–1568

Charles Hudson

Afterword by David G. Moore, Robin A. Beck Jr., and  
Christopher B. Rodning

The University of Alabama Press  
*Tuscaloosa*