

The Land of Chisca

This paper rebukes the sentiment that our American Heritage and Virginian heritage starts in 1608. Rather, I attempt to supplement that important date with information about the Mississippian culture that lived in the Middle - Appalachians as well as the other European groups in our region. While the English interests might have been on the coast and in the American North in the 17th century, Spanish exploration was conducted in the interior of the South in the 16th century. Thanks to advancements at the Berry site (Joara), in Morganton, North Carolina, as well as the work by the historians cited below, we can begin to reconstruct what the 16th century Spanish entradas in the middle- Appalachians. The primary sources used will be De Soto Chronicles, mainly the account of *The Gentleman from Elvas* and Rodrigo Rangel, The De Canco Enquiry of 1600 and the testimonies of Luisa Menendez and Theresa Martin, and the accounts of the Juan Pardo expedition in which the Martinez account will be used. Finally the crucial Domingo De Leon account, from Glanville's 2004 paper, an account originally compiled by John Worth.

In a post-1492 world, the Spanish had made great economic and political strides concerning the New World. By the time Hernando De Soto had set out to explore the interior of La Florida (The U.S South), the Spanish mercantilist machine was busy pulling silver and gold from Nueva Espana (Mexico) , and establishing political dominance in the Viceroyalty of Peru. The Iberian Encomienda (entrust) system was the engine for this tremendous system. In exchange for a conquistador's services in Christianizing and claiming the New World for the Spanish crown (In that order) , the conquistador would receive the economic rights to production

of the land¹. He could enlist the indigenous population to work in whatever capacity he desired, in exchange for his protection. Encomienda's were commonly mines or large land estates.² This promise of wealth drove many conquistadores to whatever area with a whisper of promise.

One such conquistador was Juan Pardo. Unfortunately, not much is known about the life of the explorer before his ship setting sail from Spain in 1566.³ Pardo was born east of Madrid, in a city called Cuenca. He had previous military history before being asked by the governor of Florida, Pedro Menendez De Aviles, to come to the New World by way of Santa Elena (Parris Island, SC) and begin an expedition into the mainland.⁴ Menendez had in fact founded Santa Elena himself one year earlier and desired this coastal fort to be the new capital of his La Florida, rather than the current capital of St. Augustine. Not only would this allow Menendez access to a supposed inland water route to Mexico, but also great wealth was rumored to be in the interior.⁵ From Juan Ponce de León's search for the Fountain of Youth to the legends of Chicora and La Tama, these tales fueled exploration into the interior of what would become the American South by promising untold riches—much like the rumors that drove Cortés and Pizarro. Unfortunately for Menendez, St. Augustine in present day Florida, was swampy, infested with dangerous indigenous population, and devoid of precious metals. A Lose- Lose- Lose situation. Menendez

¹ Lane, Matthew Restall and Kris. 2011. *Latin America in Colonial Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press.

² (Lane 2011)

³ Thrapp, Dan. 1988. *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography: A-F*. Omaha: University of Nebraska Press.

⁴ Hudson, Charles. 2005. *The Juan Pardo Expeditions: Exploration of the Carolinas and Tennessee, 1566-1568*. Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press.

⁵ (Hudson 2005)

assigned Pardo to investigate the lands west of Santa Elena to find a more suitable land for settlement, and more importantly, seriously lay the foundation for Spanish Domination of the American South, powered by mineral extraction in the Middle Appalachians.

Menendez probably first encountered the rumors of wealth in North America from an account of Francisco de Chicora. Francisco was captured in 1526, near Santa Elena (Parris Island). He told the Spanish that there were sources of an abundant land inland. A place where mountains of crystals loomed and Indians traded in gold and pearls.⁶ In 1600 a tribunal was called by the then governor of Florida, Mendez de Canco, on the question of moving the presidio (fort) from St. Augustine to Santa Elena. There were reports of threats to the operation, from other European powers (English and French)⁷ Those called to witness to the tribunal, were participants in various expeditions of the colony, including some who were active on the Juan Pardo expeditions. These reports were sent back to Phillip III of Spain, in the form of a letter from *De Canco in Relacion de La Tama y Su Tierra, Y de La Poblacion de Inglesas* (In Relation to La Tama and the English Population).⁸ In the mid-16th century, La Tama was a rumor, now it was listed in a document, sent to the most powerful king in Europe. Similar to the Chicora account, soldiers mention crystal mountains and Indians who wear clothing of precious metals. Even soldiers, who never venture north from Florida, are all aware of this “land of milk and

⁶ (Hudson 2005)

⁷ Arnade, Charles W. 1959. *Florida on Trial: 1593- 1602*. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press.

⁸ Sanz, Manuel Serrano y. 1912. *Documentos históricos de la Florida y la Luisiana, siglos XVI al XVIII*. Madrid: V. Suarez.

honey”.⁹ These testimonies are where we first begin to piece together the journey of Pardo, and his expedition into Virginia.

Captain Juan Pardo arrived from St. Augustine on June 29th 1566 from Spain, he and 150 men sailed up the coast to Santa Elena, disembarking on July 18th. By August when Menendez had come for a visit, Pardo had returned the fort to military order.¹⁰ Menendez wanted his new capital to be Santa Elena. Ever since De Soto’s journey, in 1539, Florida had not given the Spanish great hope for mercantilist output. Florida was a swampy desolate place, and as the testimony of a native to the inland show, “[San Augustine] is not worth a fig compared to my land”.¹¹ The Spanish were looking for mountains and “piedras preciosas (precious stones)”, in those mountains. These precious stones could be anything, from copper, crystal, gold, silver, brass, or pearls. The witnesses, both indigenous and European, in the De Canco testimonies, recount a similar way in which the Spanish conducted their search. They would ask native inhabitants, “And were there gold, silver or pearls in your land” and if the answer was “Yes“ then ”Where is it? According to various testimony in diaries, and from the 1600 tribunal, pearls did exist inland, but there is another pattern of more importance.¹² The indigenous speak of the land of ”*Chisca*”, like the following, “...three or four journeys (60-80 miles) from her village there are Indians who live in the land they call *Chisca*, where they take the said gold”,¹³.

⁹ (Arnade 1959)

¹⁰ (Hudson 2005)

¹¹ (Sanz 1912)

¹² (Sanz 1912)

¹³ (Sanz 1912)

In another account, from an indigenous chief encountered by the party of De Soto while he was camped in northeastern Tennessee, “He [the cacique] said that there was a province to the north (about 30 leagues) called *Chisca*, and that there was a foundry for copper and other metal of that color” .¹⁴ It is *Chisca* that will influence not only De Soto but the Pardo expedition as well.

Menendez wanted a colony and Encomienda of his own, and Captain Juan Pardo along with Sergeant Hernando Moyano de Morales, were going to find him one. The pair, with 150 soldiers, set off in a generally northwesterly direction from Santa Elena on December 1, 1566. Their mission, as was typical of Spanish explorers was to; Evangelize the Indians, and, Learn their language and land (“land” meaning, evaluating the existence of valuable space for Menendez to have a fruitful estate and mine any gold or silver that might be present). For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to document their journey northward only that it placed them in Joara in late February of 1567 (a pueblo, or native settlement, near Morganton, NC).¹⁵ Only in the 1980’s has archeology begun in Morganton, and some important results have been found, including parts of olive oil containers (distinctly Spanish) as well as European 16th century iron nails.¹⁶ De Soto himself spent time in “Xuala” (commonly thought of as the same Joara) on his expedition, adding more weight to the archeology.¹⁷

¹⁴ Lawrence Clayton, Charles Hudson, John Worth. 1995. *De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando De Soto in North America in 1539-1543*. Tuscaloosa: Univeristy of Alabam Press.

¹⁵ (Hudson 2005)

¹⁶Jr., Robin A. Beck. 1997. "FROM JOARA TO CHIAHA: SPANISH EXPLORATION OF THE APPALACHIAN SUMMIT AREA, 1540-1568." *Southeastern Archaeology* 162-169.

¹⁷ (Lawrence Clayton 1995)

When the expedition came to a halt, and was snowed in for about two weeks, Pardo ordered Sergeant Moyano to remain in Joara while he returned to Santa Elena to gather supplies and reinforcements.¹⁸ Shockingly, while in Santa Elena, Pardo receives a letter from Moyano, explaining that he (Moyano) had made war with a Chisca chief, and in the process burned a village down, killing many inhabitants. This event is recorded by a soldier in *The Martinez Relation* (A letter recording the events of the Pardo expedition),

“...a letter came to the captain from his sergeant in which he told him [Moyano told Pardo] the he [Moyano] had a war with the Cacique who is named Chisca, who is the enemy of the Spaniards.”¹⁹

In that same letter Moyano offered that,

“if ...the captain [Pardo] ordered it, that they would pass further on and see what was [to be seen]”.

Before Pardo's response arrived back to Moyano, Pardo receives another letter from the sergeant explaining,

“a cacique of the mountains sent a threat to the sergeant [Moyano] saying that he would come and eat them and a dog that the sergeant had. In light of this he [Moyano] decided that it would be better to go seek them than that they should come to seek him. Thus leaving the fort of

¹⁸ (Hudson 2005)

¹⁹ (Hudson 2005)

San Juan with twenty soldiers he journeyed four days over the mountains and one morning arrived at the enemies.”²⁰

At this point of the story it’s important to keep in mind that, Moyano is described as one who was less disciplined than Pardo, and who might more fit the mold of a typical conquistador. There are many accounts Moyano and Don Diego de Velasco (fellow soldier) looking for diamonds near Joara and we can assume that the riches of Chisca would have tempted him.²¹

In another account, written by Domingo de Leon who was a soldier encamped with Moyano in the spring of 1567,

“[T]hey [Native Americans] find the gold in a river next to some towns that Moyano, the sergeant of Juan Pardo, destroyed, which are called Maniatique and Guapere, and from these two towns there are Indian women in the fort of St. Augustine, now Christians married with Spaniards...”²²

What I conclude, supported by this account and others, is that Moyano left Joara in the spring of 1567. Pardo, on receiving the second letter about the Indian Cacique threatening to eat Moyano, does march to find Moyano. He eventually does on October 7th 1567, holed up (or under siege), in a village called Chiaha (thought to be Danridge, TN).²³ From the time in April that Moyano leaves Joara, to when Pardo reaches him in Chiaha, Hernando Moyano de Morales

²⁰ (Hudson 2005)

²¹ (Sanz 1912)

²² Glanville, Jim. 2004. "Conquistadors at Saltville in 1567?" *Smithfield Review*, March 1: 70-108.

²³ (Hudson 2005)

was not only in Virginia, but battled and searched for the legendary Chisca riches throughout southwest Virginia on his way back to Tennessee.

To locate Hernando De Soto in northeast Tennessee, we use an *An Account of the Gentleman from Elvas*, an anonymous account, written by a man presumably from Elvas, Portugal (~151 miles west of the region of Extremadura, the birthplace of De Soto, Pizarro and Cortes).²⁴ Extremadura was an area of poverty and isolation on the Iberian continent and had a reputation for producing conquistadores who personified the “God, Glory, and Gold” moniker. Elvas describes Chiaha as,

“...isolated between two arms of a river and was settled near one of them...the river divided into those two arms which were reunited a league below.”²⁵

Due to the extensive work of Hudson, Clayton, and Worth on De Soto’s path, we can place Hernando De Soto in upper east Tennessee, near Dandridge (Glanville thinks farther north towards Kingsport).²⁶ In another account, from Gonzalo Silvestre, De Soto hears of the enticing Chisca province mentioned earlier,

“a [De Soto was told] ... that thirty leagues away there were mines of the yellow metal that he was seeking. ..two Spaniards offered to go [there] with the Indians. One was named Juan

²⁴ (Lawrence Clayton 1995)

²⁵ (Lawrence Clayton 1995)

²⁶ (Lawrence Clayton 1995)

de Villalobos, a native of Sevilla, and the other was Francisco de Silvera, a native of Galicia....

[Spending ten days on their journey]... [they said that the mines were of fine brass] ...”²⁷

Gentleman de Elvas describes seemingly the same event, ”He [De Soto] sent two Christians from Chiaha with Indians who knew the land of Chisca and its language, in order that they might examine it”²⁸.

Chiaha’s (De Sotos encampment) estimated location is Zimmerman’s island, near Knoxville Tennessee, placing Villalobos and Silvestre and their 30 league (78 miles) hike north to Chisca (mountains), in Lee county Virginia.²⁹ If De Soto was on Zimmerman Island near Dandridge, or even farther northeast, near Kingsport, then Villalobos and Silvera are the first known Europeans in modern-day Virginia, in July of 1540. Glanville reckons near Phoebe Butt, Virginia. Phoebe Butt is ~60 miles north of Dandridge and ~50 miles west of Kingsport. Keep in mind the Spanish were ultimately headed to the mountains, so the cardinal direction isn’t of total importance.

We now have two separate accounts of Chisca, Joara, and Chiaha, as well as a solid understanding of the location of Joara, in northwestern North Carolina. We even have names of two other villages mentioned by the soldier with Moyano, Maniatique and Guapere. Luisa Menendez and Theresa Martin, two indigenous women, who were taken from the Pardo

²⁷ (Lawrence Clayton 1995)

²⁸ (Lawrence Clayton 1995)

²⁹ (Glanville 2004)

expeditions, and married Spaniards (i.e. the women in Domingo De Leon's earlier testimony accounts).

In her testimonies to the Governor of Florida in 1600, Luisa Menendez testifies that,

“...[I am] a natural Indian of the interior lands from a pueblo named Manaitique, where Moyano entered...[Moyano asked] if there was in your land gold and silver, she said amongst the Indians...they brought this gold from the mountains they called Chisca...and that the same there is a body of water with three or four springs of salt water...and all the land there is no other salt water.”³⁰

Her testimony, corroborated by Theresa Martin³¹ provides three vital pieces of evidence;

1. She is aware of and perhaps lives near the Chisca mountains (not a pueblo but an area), 2. Her town is where salt is present in large quantities, 3. She met Moyano in her pueblo.³² Many Indians describe having gold, silver, and pearls in their areas but describing salt is a phenomenon out of the ordinary. There is a town in Southwest Virginia known for producing salt, Saltville.

The first modern salt production in Saltville was recorded in 1797, later, Saltville became the “Salt Capital of the Confederacy”.³³ Saltville is around a 5- day march (100 miles) from Joara, and certainly within the striking distance of Indian guided conquistadores. It is not difficult to imagine Moyano needing an excuse to advance on the famed Chisca territory. But of

³⁰ (Sanz 1912)

³¹ (Sanz 1912)

³² (Sanz 1912)

³³ (Glanville 2004)

course, Moyano attacks another pueblo, before ending up in Chiaha, a village called Guapere.³⁴ The location of Guapere is disputed, from being near Ashville, North Carolina, Elizabethton Tennessee, or perhaps even Kingsport Tennessee.³⁵ The account of Martinez assumes that after Moyano's first excursion, presumably the one where Moyana picks up Martin in Saltville, he returns to Joara to wait for orders from Pardo, and then heads out again to Guapere (to fight the mountain Cacique who threatened the dog). However, there are reasons to not assume that he returned to Joara, but rather continued fighting his way to Chiaha in Tennessee.

Luisa Menendez's testimony speaks of Moyano looking for riches, coupled with the other testimony from soldiers with Moyano, leads me to believe that the threat from the mountain cacique came in quick succession of the first, original, threat. I believe Moyano receives the threat while in Saltville, and rather than turning back to Joara, he goes to hunt down this mountain Cacique (presumably in Guapere).³⁶ The route he took would have been likely a south westerly route, down the great Indian Trail (roughly I-81 South).³⁷ This trail would also lead to Chiaha (where Pardo eventually finds Moyano).

Southwestern Virginia played a substantial role in Spanish strategy and clearly was important to the other European powers already in Virginia. In the late 1500's the Spanish had become distracted by foreign wars and economic depression in the mainland and eventually gave up their pursuit of mining the South. 300 years later, there would be a great commodity shipped

³⁴ (Glanville 2004)

³⁵ (Jr. 1997)

³⁶ (Glanville 2004)

³⁷ (Jr. 1997)

out of southwest Virginia that would bring powerful men from all over the wealthiest country in the world to extract it. These modern day conquistadors were northern industrialists, and the precious mountain resource would be coal.

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