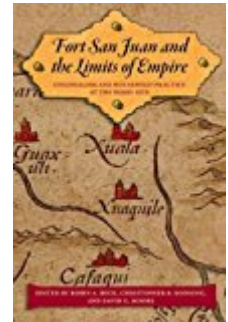


Robin A. Beck, Christopher Bernard Rodning, David G. Moore, eds.. *Fort San Juan and the Limits of Empire: Colonialism and Household Practice at the Berry Site*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. 448 pp. \$89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-6159-7.



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In *Fort San Juan and the Limits of Empire: Colonialism and Household Practice at the Berry Site*, Robin Beck, Christopher Rodning, and David Moore bring together nearly two decades of excavation and scholarship to produce a detailed reconstruction of the social relations of household and daily practice on a colonial frontier. In doing so, they avoid the broad brush strokes of history and instead focus on the domestic contexts in which Spanish soldiers and their Native hosts lived and interacted. Their work is in keeping with contemporary theoretical trends which seek to understand colonial frontiers through the “middle grounds”[1] and “entanglements”[2] experienced by Indigenous and European persons navigating new social and physical spaces. While much of the content is aimed at a specialist audience of archaeologists and historians, it will also appeal to a broad range of topical interests which cross-cut disciplines, including colonial, military, material, and architectural studies.

By way of context: In December 1566, Juan Pardo left the newly established Spanish colony of

Santa Elena, on modern Parris Island, NC, on an expedition to investigate the continental interior, claim lands for Spain, subjugate the local Native population, and establish a route to the silver mines of central Mexico. During the winter of 1566-67, Pardo established Fort San Juan and the settlement of Cuenca at Joara, a Mississippian town led by an influential Mico, or chief. By the spring of 1568, relations between the Spanish and Natives had deteriorated and Fort San Juan and five others in the interior were burnt by the Natives and abandoned, with few survivors. The volume weaves a compelling narrative which fills the gaps in this account through a careful analysis of the materiality of Spanish-Native relations from the initial settlement of the fort through the process of declining relations and the eventual conflagration that destroyed the settlement. All of these events took place within approximately a year and a half—an uncommonly brief snapshot in archaeological time.

The editors are also authors of many of the book's chapters and others were written by or co-

authored with specialists. The organization of the volume features five sections. Each begins with a brief first-person vignette and summary of the main points of that section; these introductions set the tone for each chapter and help the reader determine which chapters and parts thereof will perhaps appeal to more specific interests. Part 1, "Joara, Cuenca, and Fort San Juan," summarizes Pardo's *entradas* into the Carolinas and introduces the major research questions which guided the project and the structure of the volume. Part 2, "Who they Were: Situating the Colonial Encounter," locates Joara in time and reviews a primary account of the expedition and its route into the interior Southeast, translated and summarized by John Worth. Part 3, "Where they Lived: Household Archaeology at San Juan," is the heart of the volume. It comprises a close study of the Spanish compound, its architectural components, and its spatial contexts that blends archaeological evidence with the documentary record to develop an occupational history for the excavated structures, structural elements, and associated features. Black-and-white images and color plates illustrate stages and areas of excavation, plans of the compound and structures, and thin sections of sediments from structure features. One is immediately struck by the excellent preservation of perishable materials, including the architectural elements described by Lee Newson in chapter 5.

In part 4, "What they Ate," Gayle Fritz and Heather Lapham provide detailed analyses of the botanical and faunal material recovered from the site in order to reconstruct provisioning patterns and the relative importance of various foodstuffs. Part 5, "What they Carried," reviews the European and Native artifacts recovered from the site in order to understand what the Spanish brought with them as well as the incorporation of Indigenous material culture into daily life in the compound. The final section, part 6, "What they Left Behind," summarizes the data presented with reference to the research questions posed and presents the editors' conclusions regarding the organization of

labor and Native-Spanish social relations in the compound. They also consider the aftermath of the destruction of the Spanish compound in the context of the general Spanish withdrawal from the Carolinas.

The narrative presented by the editors and specialists is compelling. They argue that the initial Spanish settlement shows evidence of Spanish-Native cooperation in building projects, with at least one structure constructed in the winter of 1567 according to a Mississippian architectural grammar but employing European tools. During this same interval, Native men provisioned the Spanish with deer and bear meat, the latter a delicacy reserved for honored guests. Native women were also present in the compound and prepared plant-based dishes in keeping with Native culinary practices. Later in the year, it appears that relations between the locals and Spanish soured. At least one structure was constructed in the fall of 1567 apparently without the input of Native craftsmen, resulting in a somewhat insubstantial structure which may have functioned as a formal kitchen, located near refuse pits and an outdoor hearth. Bear meat declines in the assemblage and prepared venison suggests Native men were no longer working within the compound, although plant remains suggest the continued presence of Native women who may have adapted their cooking to Spanish preferences. In their conclusions, the authors suggest that Spanish colonial policy and improprieties of the Spanish men towards Native women may have contributed to the breakdown in relations, which ultimately led to the destruction and abandonment of the settlement.

Chapters 4-9 are heavy on analytical detail and nonspecialists may find them tough going, while many archaeologists will undoubtedly revel in the technicalities of the material analyses and cultural remains described therein. There is some repetition of interpretations and conclusions throughout the volume; however, this functions to

reiterate the key findings of the project and link the chapters into a cohesive whole.

In 2013, the editors announced that they had located a ditch or moat at the site which they believe encircles the remains of Fort San Juan itself. [3] Clearly, the Berry site, and Beck, Rodning, and Moore, will continue to produce enhanced understandings of the colonial frontier during one of the most pivotal points in North American history.

Notes

[1]. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[2]. Kurt A. Jordan, "Colonies, Colonialism, and Cultural Entanglement: The Archaeology of Postcolumbian Intercultural Relations," in *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, ed. Teresita Majewski and David Gaimster (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2009), 31-48.

[3]. John Noble Wilford, "Fort Tells of Spain's Early Ambitions," *New York Times*, July 22, 2013.

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