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Maritime Research Division

A Survey for Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon's Lost Capitana

By Christopher F. Amer

"Here we go." Carl Naylor's matter-of-fact tone belied his concern for the safety of the survey crew riding the 25-foot C-Hawk and in the much smaller McKee following astern. We were in the final two days of the groundtruthing phase of our 2006 six-week-survey for a 16th-century Spanish vessel that was lost during its approach to Winyah Bay in 1526. The effects of Hurricane Gordon that passed South Carolina some 1,000 miles offshore were being felt along the state's coastline by five-foot swells and variable wind and wave conditions. Our daily route to the open ocean and our survey area off South Island was via the North Santee River. And its mouth was guarded by an almost continuous phalanx of shoals with one narrow six-foot-deep passage to allow a boat to pass. We had ventured out of the river mouth to try to eke one final dive day out of the project before returning to Columbia. However, with conditions deteriorating en route to the dive sites five miles up the coast near Winyah Bay, the sea "advised" us that it was not to be. While the route through the shoals seemed tricky coming out of the river, the return looked to be impossible as we viewed the continuous line of foaming water.

Fig. 1: Maritime Research Division boats crossing the treacherous entrance shoals of the North Santee River. (*SCIAA photo*)

Carl pointed the bow towards where the "channel" should be and...

Four hundred and eighty years ago, the crew and passengers aboard six small (by modern standards) sailing craft nearing Winyah Bay must surely have viewed a similar sight with some considerable trepidation. After all, without the benefit of motors and the other trappings of our modern culture and having only wind and sail to power their vessels, they would get no second chance if the pilot chose unwisely. On August 9, 1526, the pilot of the lead ship made just such an error, costing them their Capitana on the shoals and foreshadowing the failure of the Spanish settlement effort. The enterprise, led by Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon, a lawyer and resident of Havana, was an attempt by the Spanish to establish the first European settlement in North America.

The idea for the expedition had settled upon De Ayllon several years earlier. He arrived in Hispaniola from Spain in 1502 and took up several prominent positions in the colony as auditor, judge for His Majesty in the Royal Court and Chancellery, knight of the Order of Santiago, and member of the Royal Council of Hispaniola. Based in Puerto Plata, de Ayllon also invested heavily in sugar plantations, gold mines, and slaves. Licensed in the slave trade in 1521, de Ayllon along with a business associate, Sancho Ortiz de Urrutia, initiated two expeditions to acquire slaves from the Bahamas.

In the spring of 1521, pilots Francisco Gordillo and Pedro de Quejo set out on separate slaving expeditions for their respective employers, de Ayllon and de Urrutia. However, after coming up empty handed of slaves, they joined forces at Andros, and sailed north and west in their caravels to search for slaves in what is now the Southeast United States. Making landfall on June 24, 1521, at a river they named Jordan (Santee River), they laid claim to the land. There they traded with the Native Americans who greeted them on the beach, and explored the near coast before relocating their vessels to a better anchorage three leagues along the coast (Winyah Bay). After two weeks of trading, they enticed 60 natives onboard through false pretenses and made their way back to Hispaniola, losing one caravel along the way.

Later that year, de Ayllon traveled to Spain to ask King Charles V to arbitrate a dispute over the slaves. There, he convinced the monarch that the land from which they had acquired the slaves had great potential and that he alone had

the financial resources and capability to settle the new land. He also maintained a fiction that the region explored on the 1521 voyage lay at 37 degrees N. (around the Chesapeake), the same latitude as Andalusia, not 33 degrees 30 minutes as recorded by the pilots Gordillo and Quejo. On June 12, 1523, de Ayllon was granted a patent to settle the new land as "the king's agent for the new venture." To satisfy the obligations of the royal patent, in 1525 de Ayllon sponsored a second expedition to gather data upon which the crown could formulate policies for the annexation of the new land into the Spanish Empire. Quejo sailed from Hispaniola in the spring of 1525 with two caravels and 60 men. Making landfall at Rio de la Cruz (Savannah River), he made his way along the coast to Winyah Bay. Following directions given to him by de Ayllon, Quejo then explored the coastline from the Chesapeake Bay down to North Florida, before returning to Hispaniola with some Indian interpreters onboard.

During the following year, de Ayllon purchased six ships for a third voyage, which he would lead. These included three naos, two caravels (one possibly a brigantine), and a patache. De Ayllon designated the *Chorruca*, one of the naos, the Capitana, or lead vessel of the fleet. He brought together nearly 600 persons, including crew, doctors, black slaves, clergymen, surgeons and other men, women, and children to make the trip, as well as nearly 100 horses, sheep, pigs, and cattle. Additionally, he amassed the necessary supplies needed to initially sustain the settlers while they established a settlement in their new home. This included 4,000 gallons of olive oil, 1,000 bushels of corn, and 6,000 pounds of bread.

By mid-July 1526, the expedition was assembled in Puerto Plata harbor and set outbound for the River Jordan. On August 9, the lookouts sighted Cabo San Roman (North Island), but while attempting to navigate the shoals, possibly during a storm, the Capitana was wrecked. While de Ayllon, passengers and crew escaped unscathed, the ship and supplies were lost. This was a disaster for the expedition, as the Capitana carried many of the supplies needed to set up the colony. Soon after their arrival, the Native American translators bolted and de Ayllon decided that the land, which was composed mostly of acidic sands, was not suitable for colonization. He had the colonists build a boat (*La Gavarra*) to replace the lost Capitana, while three groups explored the coast northeast and southwest for a more fruitful location to establish a colony.

In September, the men that remained fit took the horses and livestock overland southwest along the coast, while the women, children, and those colonists that were ill sailed south in the six vessels. The two groups met up at Rio Seco (Sapelo Inlet) and established a town they called San Miguel de Gualdape. The loss of the supplies on the Capitana seriously effected their survival. They arrived too late in the year to plant crops and disease was dropping the colonists like flies. De Ayllon died and the ensuing anarchy and social unrest led to the abandonment of the colony in late fall. In all, of the nearly 600 hopeful colonists that departed Puerto Plata five months earlier, some 150 wretched souls abandoned the New World and headed for home leaving the locations of the settlement and shipwreck a mystery for later scholars to ponder.

Fig. 2: Southeastern Coast of North America from "Map of the World," by Juan Vespucci, 1526. From, A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient (page 24), by Dr. Paul E. Hoffman.

Fig. 3: Carl Naylor and Richard Lawrence prepare to deploy the magnetometer sensor. (*SCIAA photo*)

In 2005, the staff of SCIAA's Maritime Research Division (MRD-SCIAA) in collaboration with Coastal Carolina University's Department of Marine Science (MSCI-CCU), initiated a survey to locate the remains of the lost Capitana. The significance of actually discovering the wreck and its contents cannot be overstated. The wreck itself is the earliest documented shipwreck in North America, while the cargo contained many of the items necessary to establish a settlement in the wilderness. The question is where is the wreck? One researcher in the 1950s speculated through historical research that the vessel's remains should lie at the entrance to the Cape Fear River, while subsequent research placed it near Winyah Bay. The Chavez Rutter, a 1526 set of sailing directions made by pilots who navigated the southeast coast of the New World during the first quarter of the 16th century, placed the River Jordan at modern day Santee River and Cabo San Roman on North Island at the entrance to Winyah Bay. These locations were later confirmed in a rutter of 1609.

Over the 480 years since the Capitana was lost, the shorelines in South Carolina characteristically have migrated from tens to 100s of meters landward. However, scientists studying the historical coastal locations of the north side of the Winyah Bay entrance have determined that its position has migrated over three kilometers south since that time, halted only by the building of stone jetties in the late 19th century and subsequent annual channel dredging. The southern boundary of the harbor has not been studied with respect to shoreline position during that time period. However, this collaborative research project, is attempting to rectify this paucity of data by interfacing historic coastal zone paleo reconstructions south of the Bay with the archaeological survey. Using a variety of scientific techniques, including ground penetrating radar and luminescence dating, MSCI-CCU scientists, Drs. Scott Harris and Eric

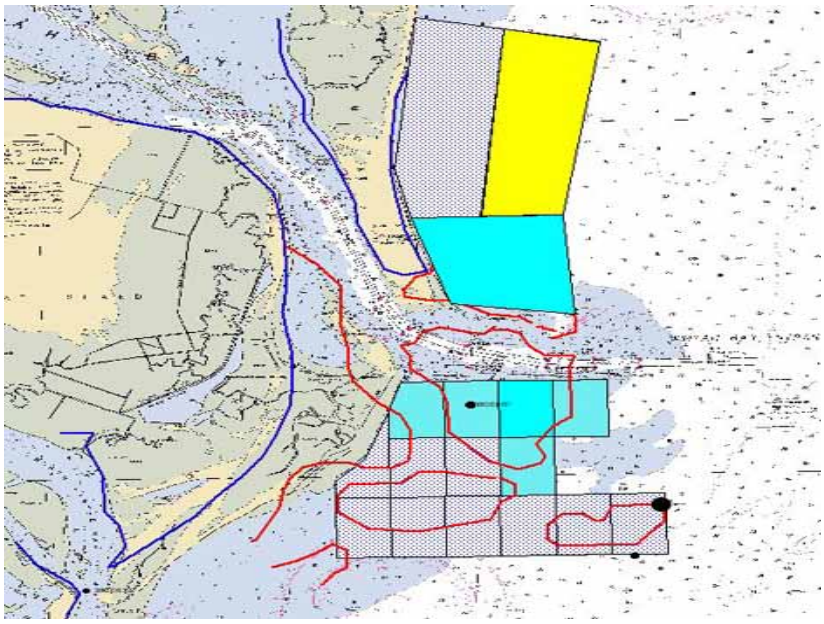

Fig. 4: Map of the primary project area. Stippled blocks are the areas surveyed in 2005 and 2006. Solid blocks are areas to be surveyed in 2007. (*SCIAA photo*)

Fig. 5: Dr. Scott Harris returns to the surface after a dive. (*SCIAA photo*)

Wright, hope to establish a paleogeographic reconstruction of historical Winyah Bay entrances at approximately 100-year increments, providing ancient harbor shorelines and extrapolated shoal positions to help guide the placement of survey priority areas. Until funding is secured for the geological work, the archaeological survey is guided by reference to historic charts and other documents which suggest that, over time, the locations of many of the shoals off Winyah Bay have remained fairly stable and that, prior to jetty construction, the main channel into the Bay ran due south.

2005/2006 Field Season Results

The project has already realized two field seasons of archaeological survey using contemporary Spanish documents and historic navigation charts to guide our search areas. During a brief August 2005 survey and a more extensive July/August 2006 field season, the MRD-SCIAA, using an Archaeological Research Trust grant awarded in 2005, surveyed approximately 27.25 square kilometers (10.5 square miles) of the estimated 104 square kilometers (40 square miles) of priority areas encompassing the approaches to the bay and within Winyah Bay proper. While the 2005 survey concentrated on the region off North Island, the 2006 fieldwork focused on a region of historic shoals guarding the pre-19th century southern approach into the Bay. This included a one-square-kilometer (0.39-square-mile) survey block off the North Santee River in which a retired shrimper from McClellenville reported recovering an 18th-century Spanish olive jar. Additionally, this year we groundtruthed and identified the sources of six of the most promising magnetic anomalies offshore and six sites within Winyah Bay.

Between September 12 and 22, 2006, the staff of the MRD-SCIAA, along with volunteers from the Charleston Aquarium, Georgia Institute of Technology, Coastal Carolina University, and the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology office, returned to the Winyah Bay area to identify the sources of the more promising magnetic anomalies recorded during the one-month magnetic survey of the shoals and

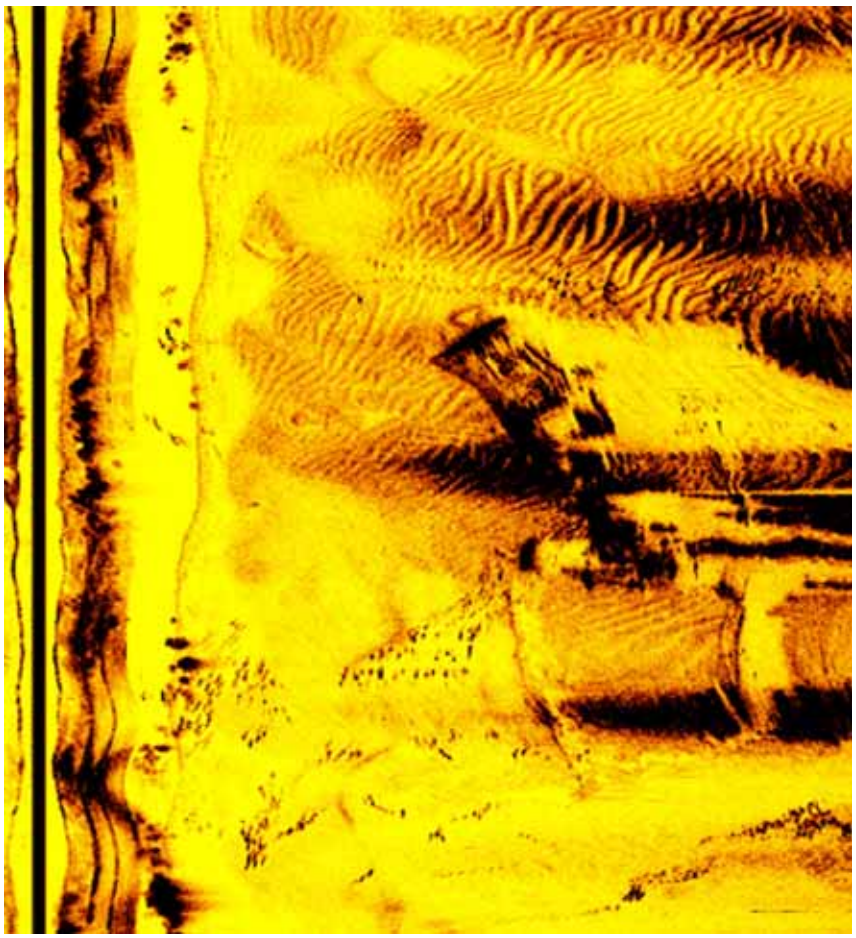

Fig. 6: Side-scan sonar image of a shipwreck located during the 2006 survey. The wreck components are the dark rectilinear objects to the right of the image amid the sand ripples. (*SCIAA photo*)

Fig. 7: Matt Mimms (right) operates the ADAP III navigation computer while his Dad, Bob, (left) looks on from the deck. Bob Mimms will become a new ART Board Member in February. (*SCIAA photo*)

entrance to Winyah Bay in July and August. For three days at the start and two days at the end of the groundtruthing phase, inclement sea conditions, due to two hurricanes which passed some 1,000 miles east of Winyah Bay, prevented work outside the estuary. However, these conditions provided the MRD with an opportunity to conduct a remote sensing survey for the blockade runner, *Queen of the Waves*, apparently located in the sheltered waters of the North Santee River delta. The survey demonstrated that the wreck of the blockade runner does not lie at, or near, the location indicated in the State Site Files. The "hurricane days" also allowed us adequate time to assess six magnetic anomalies located in Winyah Bay along the shorelines of North and South islands. These forays into the black, rapid-moving waters of the Bay brought to light mooring blocks, crab traps, and an assortment of modern debris, but nothing historic, much less of 16th century origin.

The bulk of the groundtruthing phase was spent investigating magnetic anomalies on the shoals south of the historic entrance to Winyah Bay. There, we investigated six anomalies that showed promising signatures. Each site location was first investigated using side-scan sonar to determine if any cultural objects protruded from the seafloor, and if so, if the objects matched magnetic signatures. Then two divers would investigate the objects showing above the bottom, or if none were visible, locate and investigate the source of the magnetic signature using a hand-held magnetometer and probe. If the source was buried, the divers would use a water induction dredge to expose the anomaly and its features would be identified, usually by feel in the turbid waters off the Bay.

Unfortunately, nothing of a 16th century vintage appeared in the test excavation holes we dug in the seafloor. However, we did identify two probable shipwrecks of a younger antiquity, perhaps 19th or early 20th century. One of these may have been the blockade runner, *Sir Robert Peel*, known to be lost on the shoals. The second site is almost certainly a steamship, with the remains of two boilers visible to the touch, if not to the eye. Other finds included buried unidentified iron objects, an iron box-like object, a six-foot-long admiralty type anchor with a broken shank and ring missing (which probably explains why it was buried in the seafloor rather that still on a vessel), a length of tow cable, and a towing bitt, which projected from the sandy seafloor like a fire hydrant.

With the return of inclement marine conditions from the effects of Hurricane Helene towards the close of our second week, we conducted a side-scan sonar survey of the shoreline along South Island within the Bay. Using the sonar, we were able to identify the remains of several submerged docks and clusters of wooden piles, vestiges of the Bay's historic past. One of these docks shows up on NOAA charts of the Bay prior to 1929, but disappears off the charts after that.

Currently, we are compiling and organizing the plethora of data amassed during the 2005/2006 field seasons and entering it into our

Geographical Information System to analyze the results. Additional archival research has revealed several 19th century historic charts and maps that offer positions for historic submerged resources, including the Civil War era steamer *Osceola*, previously believed to have been wrecked at a different location, docks from the period, and a tantalizing notation on an 1855 chart that shows a "Wreck" on the 1855 shoreline of South Island, now buried beneath the sand dunes more than a kilometer from the ocean. With renewed funding from the Archaeological Research Trust in 2006, the team will continue the survey this year, hopefully locating the remains of the earliest shipwreck in North America. The success of many archaeology projects in the Palmetto State is due, in no small part, to the diligence of volunteers and project supporters. This is no less the case with this project. The author and staff of the MRD-SCIAA wish to thank the following persons for their assistance during the diving phase of the survey: Arnold Postell, Dive Safety Officer for the South Carolina Aquarium, and his two Aquarium volunteers, Jay and Ted; Dr. Scott Harris and Steve Luff from Coastal Carolina University; and Dr. Paul Work from the Georgia Institute of Technology. Thanks go to the Archaeological Research Trust Board of Trustees for their support. Last, but by no means least, our great appreciation goes to Bob Mimms, who provided sumptuous seafood dinners gratis to the members of the survey team (and guests) at his Litchfield Beach Fish House Restaurant and his son, Matt, who braved contrary seas to spend a day surveying with us.

Oh, and as to whether we made it back to safety unscathed...what do you think?

Integrating the Southeastern's Spanish Legacy into the Educational Curriculum

By James Spirek

An invitation to speak at a seminar about the Spanish presence in South Carolina and along the southeastern coast of the United States brought Drs. Stanley South, Chester DePratter, and myself to Atlanta in late December. The "Seminar on the Integration of Spanish Identity in Georgia: A Model for Peace Education" brought together researchers and educators to discuss the rich historical archaeological record of the Spanish presence in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The main purpose of the event was to strategize ways in which to incorporate this information into Georgia's educational curriculum. Arranged by Dr. Robert DeVillar, director of the Center for Hispanic Studies at Kennesaw State University, and Dr. Dennis Blanton, curator of Native American Archaeology at Fernbank Museum of Natural History, the symposium also included several distinguished colleagues from Seville, Spain: Isabel Simó Rodríguez, a paleographer and the director of the General Archives of the Indies, Julian Ruiz Rivera, a specialist in American history, and Fernando de Amores Carredano, a specialist in pre"history to discuss means of mutual collaboration and assistance. Spain's Ministry of Education and Science funded the seminar.

The two-day seminar featured Dr. John Worth, researcher at the Randell Research Center, Florida, speaking about the Spanish missionary system from the 16th century until its collapse under pressure from British colonial sponsored slave raids in the mid to late 18th century. I presented on the Maritime Research Division's recent work on searching for the capitana shipwreck associated with the Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon expedition to colonize along the southeastern coast in 1526 [see Ayllon article in this issue], and on our work researching the French corsair, *Le Prince*, and its predatory relationship with Spain's New World empire. Dr. DePratter spoke about the ongoing archaeological work in Santa Elena, while Dr. South reflected on the past 25 years of his and Chester's work at the one time Spanish capital of *La Florida*. Dr. Blanton talked about his recent work in locating a Spanish mission site on the lower Ocmulgee River in Georgia. A discussion then ensued with our Spanish colleagues on potential avenues of mutual research and educational initiatives.

The following day focused on bringing together various representatives of the Georgia educational system to learn about and devise strategies to incorporate the Spanish historical presence into the state's elementary, middle, and high school, as well as college curriculum. Additionally, as one educator noted, this information will help the growing population of Hispanics in Georgia, as well as throughout the region, to realize the past Spanish contributions to the heritage of the southeast, and in turn help to connect them to their new homeland. In South Carolina, promoting the public educational component of the work at Santa Elena has always been a high priority. For a number of years, Drs. South and DePratter have facilitated field trips for interested school groups to visit the site while excavations are underway. Additionally, a popular text, *Archaeology at Santa Elena: Doorway to the Past*, discussing the findings of the Spanish experience on Parris Island, is geared towards a general audience. The discussions about promoting educational values of the historical Spanish presence in Georgia is applicable to South Carolina. We intend to continue and contribute to this initiative discussing our mutual historical past and its educational value with our colleagues from the neighboring state.

Participants of the seminar, including SCIAA researchers Jim Spirek, Chester DePratter, and Stan South, front and left, respectively. (*Photo courtesy of Kennesaw State University*)