



**Dennis B. Blanton.** *Conquistador's Wake: Tracking the Legacy of Hernando de Soto in the Indigenous Southeast.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020. Illustrations. 256 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8203-5637-2.

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Dennis B. Blanton's *Conquistador's Wake* from the University of Georgia Press is based on his long-term archaeological investigations at the Glass site, a sixteenth-century Native American village located in south-central Georgia in the southeastern United States. The book has two main objectives. The first is to present to a popular audience the processes, thinking, and sense of discovery involved in archaeological research. The second is to present an overview of Blanton's long-term investigations and interpretations of the Glass site. In particular, Blanton argues that Glass was a Native settlement that was visited in 1540 by the Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto. Soto led an expedition that traversed much of the southeastern United States between 1539 and 1542. Scholars and the general public have long been fascinated with finding sites associated with Soto for a variety of reasons that range from local boosterism in the form of "Soto slept here" to attempts by archaeologists and cultural anthropologists to reconstruct the social geography of Native societies documented in the accounts of the expedition. Finding Native sites in the Southeast associated with Soto and other sixteenth-century expeditions has been important because Soto marks the time of first contact for many Native groups. He and other Europeans of the sixteenth century

were the vanguard of colonialism that led to the extirpation and profound transformations of Native societies across the Southeast, but the Soto horizon represents the time when Native societies were still intact and the full effects of colonialism were yet to unfold.

This book is written for a lay audience, and Blanton provides a clear statement on his objectives in reaching out to non-archaeologists. Blanton explains, "I have given honest commentary, mostly for the benefit of the less initiated, on the day-to-day practice of archaeology and history. I have sought to demystify the process, to explain how it works—and sometimes doesn't—and how it can be steered by quirks of luck and happenstance. Along the way, I have also tried to explain the good, the bad, and the ugly of archaeological evidence itself. We pity the modern-day detective assigned to a cold case, but that's the only kind an archaeologist knows, and in the extreme" (p. 174). Blanton presents his personal journey to becoming an archaeologist and scholar, and I suspect his story of pursuing one's passions as a career will resonate with many readers. Blanton's journey from a high school student interested in local history to a professional archaeologist takes place largely in his home state of Georgia. His strong sense of place and his passion for the deep history

of his home state are clearly conveyed in his discussion of his development as a scholar.

Blanton does an excellent and thorough job of bringing the reader into the processes, rhythms, in-the-moment decision-making, challenges, and exhilarations of archaeological fieldwork and research. For example, in chapter 3, he describes for non-archaeologists the methods used to discover, interpret, and investigate a site. It clearly and effectively conveys in an interesting narrative the objectives and processes of archaeological fieldwork to a nonprofessional audience. I can see myself assigning this chapter in classes. Blanton presents a narrative of his research at Glass as if the investigations are unfolding in real time for the reader. Through this, the reader gets a sense of the in-the-moment decision-making and uncertainty that are a part of all archaeological fieldwork. For example, he conveys the challenges of interpreting and making sense of complicated archaeological deposits and the results of remote-sensing surveys. He also captures the importance and the thrill of discovering rare objects, such as a faceted chevron bead and an iron celt, items that both indicate very early contact between Native Americans and Europeans.

The second objective of this book is to discuss the Glass site as an important sixteenth-century Native settlement and, more specifically, to present Blanton's argument that this town was visited in 1540 by the army led by Soto. As I read early chapters of the book, I was concerned that Blanton may place too much emphasis on the thrill of discovering unusual objects, but these concerns were allayed in later chapters where the objects and other archaeological remains are used to develop interpretations about the Native American community that is represented by the Glass site. Blanton clearly guides the reader through the history of this town. His discussion includes and draws from a significant amount of archaeological knowledge, but the history he presents is clear and accessible to the non-archaeologist. He situ-

ates the site as the capital of a Native American province in the region. Blanton also does an excellent job of helping the reader to visualize the settlement as it would have looked in the sixteenth century, which is an important talent. As archaeologists, we are familiar with using the bird's-eye view presented in a map of cultural features at a site, identifying key features (for example, houses, public buildings, and plazas), and using these to visualize and understand the spatial layout of a community. This is such a common practice for archaeologists that we can forget we actually are using an interpretive process that is not familiar to nonprofessionals. Blanton begins with the bird's-eye view of the Glass site that is so recognizable to archaeologists, but he then brings the reader down to ground level to imagine walking through the settlement. The use of many excellent illustrations helps him to clearly conduct his tour of this ancient town.

Blanton interprets the archaeological assemblage from the Glass site as evidence that the Native town there had been visited by Soto's entrada in 1540. In this scenario, Soto's army would have visited Glass after their winter encampment among the Apalachee in present-day Tallahassee, Florida. Blanton includes a very interesting section where he considers the kinds of environmental, cultural, and linguistic variability that members of Soto's army would have encountered along their march from Tallahassee into southern Georgia. Blanton is very aware of the intense scrutiny that all proposed Soto sites receive, and he logically uses several criteria to argue that Glass is a Soto site. Primarily, Glass is located in approximately the right place, and its unique and diverse assemblage of sixteenth-century European material culture indicates it was occupied at approximately the right time. Additionally, Glass would have been a prominent town in its region, a setting that would have been attractive to Soto who was drawn to Native leaders and prominent settle-

ments where he would have sought labor and food stores to support his army.

Although the Glass site meets all of Blanton's criteria for being a site that was visited by Soto, one of the significant challenges to this interpretation is that Soto's entrada is only one of several sixteenth-century European explorations that occurred within approximately 160 kilometers of the Glass site between 1513 and 1565. These multiple explorations include the failed 1526 colony of Lucas Valazquez de Ayllon located somewhere on the Atlantic coast; the 1528 expedition of Panfilo de Narvaez, which passed through the Florida Panhandle; Soto's march into south Georgia in 1540; and the French settlements of Charlesfort and Fort Caroline, which were located on the Atlantic coast at different times between 1562 and 1565. As critics have pointed out, and as Blanton himself acknowledges, the European items recovered at Glass could have originated from any one of these expeditions. Blanton even provides an excellent and fascinating example of the portability of Spanish trade goods within Native American societies when he relates the story of when Soto's own men visited the Native town of Cofitachequi in South Carolina they found Spanish objects from the 1526 Ayllon colony, which had occurred fourteen years earlier and approximately 150 kilometers to the east.

Although Blanton acknowledges the possibility that the European items from Glass could have come from any one of these European settlements or expeditions, his conclusion is that Glass was visited by Soto. Indeed, he states that "if the Glass Site is not recognized as a likely Soto site, then there are precious few other sites in the entire region, if any, that qualify" (p. 178). This is misleading, though, because most other potential Soto sites do not have multiple other sixteenth-century expeditions with which they possibly could be associated. No one is disputing that Glass is an important early to mid-sixteenth-century Native community whose residents would have been

some of the first people in the region to be in contact with European goods and quite likely Europeans themselves. What is less clear and disputed is that the Soto expedition was the source of these items.

Blanton acknowledges the resistance that his interpretation of Glass as a Soto site has received in the professional community. One way he tries to minimize this resistance is by saying that his interpretations are alternative facts that challenge received wisdom. He notes that a consensus has formed among "many archaeologists and nonprofessionals" that the Glass Site assemblage is plausibly from Soto, but since this will upset the previous consensus regarding Soto's route, accepting this new information has been a slow process (p. 183). This does not, however, fully portray the questions and concerns that professional archaeologists have with Blanton's interpretations of Glass. Although it is true that new and novel information often is not universally embraced at first, this is not the only reason that Blanton's interpretations of the Glass site have been challenged. As discussed above, the resistance to Glass being a Soto site is that his expedition is one of several, equally plausible sources for the European artifacts found at Glass.

I want to conclude by emphasizing two points. Although Blanton's interpretations of Glass as a Soto site are controversial, this book and his overall body of work from Glass are not. Instead, they are valuable contributions to the archaeology of the southeastern United States that present information about an important, recently investigated site that dates to the early contact period, a transformative time for Native peoples. Blanton's work at Glass has generated a robust data set from an important Native settlement that likely was the principal town in a sixteenth-century regional polity. As a result, this book and Blanton's work at Glass will be the basis for much future research. The second point I want to make is how refreshing it is to have a popular account of modern archae-

ological discovery from the southeastern United States. Many of us have probably read books or *National Geographic* articles about field research and important discoveries from exotic locales, and these may have been formative experiences in our development as professional researchers. In college, I read Donald Johanson and Maitland Edey's book *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind* (1981), and I was fascinated by Johanson's tales of his team's fossil-hunting expeditions in the East African Rift Valley and by his account of the actual moment of discovery of Lucy. That book played a big role in my decision to become an anthropologist. I suspect Blanton's book will provide the same sense of discovery and inspiration for many readers from a locale that is much closer to home but one that is equally fascinating and equally important for making discoveries that allow all of us to better understand the human experience.

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