

1



Spain and the Native Americans: The Guale Revolt, 1597

The era of Georgia history about which the public knows the least is undoubtedly the century and a half of Spanish domination. The first European to see Georgia was possibly Juan Ponce de León during his 1513 journey to Florida. The honor of establishing the first permanent settlement within the present U.S. boundaries goes to the gifted Spanish soldier, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. In 1565 he established the Florida town of St. Augustine as part of an expedition to destroy French influence in the area. The following year he journeyed northward, stopping probably at St. Catherine's Island, where the natives, impressed by Spanish power, offered their friendship. Taking the name of the local peoples, the Spanish called the area along the Georgia coast Guale.

On the same voyage Menéndez established a major settlement at Santa Elena (Port Royal) in present South Carolina. Spanish presidios were soon erected all along the Atlantic shoreline, and expeditions, such as that of Pardo and Boyano, created small outposts in the interior. Nonetheless, permanent Spanish settlers stayed away from the Guale province. Opulent Mexico and Peru were

too tempting for those whose ambitions ran toward material possessions, and no one seemed interested in living where riches could not be found immediately. Thus, the Spanish hit on the bright idea of letting the missionaries do the work of colonizing, by turning converted Indians into their settlers.

The Jesuits were the first seriously to make the attempt, but the most successful Christianizers in Guale were the Franciscans. The latter's greatest influence came after 1593, following the arrival in Florida of twelve missionaries led by Fray Juan de Silva. The friars soon spread out along the coast, half locating in Guale, where missions were established at principal Indian towns. Within three years the Franciscans had about fifteen hundred converts whom they instructed in religion and in the European lifestyle. Troubles came in 1597, however, when a rebellious Indian named Juanillo murdered Fray Pedro Corpa, the missionary at Tolomato, near present Darien. As the revolt spread, four other friars were martyred and one, Fray Francisco de Ávila, taken captive. Father Ávila remained in bondage for about ten months until rescued by the Spanish. Now, almost four hundred years later, historians, anthropologists, and Roman Catholic clergy have prepared materials for the Vatican Congregation for Sainthood Causes.¹

The uprising was quickly put down by the Spanish governor at St. Augustine, who sent an army up to Guale to subdue the Indians. Having reasserted their authority, the Spanish returned to the task of civilizing and Christianizing their backsliding charges. They were marvelously successful, and the first half of the seventeenth century became the golden age of Spanish settlement in the Southeast. At the peak, the Franciscans served about twenty-five thousand converts located near thirty-eight missions spread throughout the region. According to Ray Allen Billington in his *Westward Expansion*, "The mission stations won southeastern North America for Spain. . . . The Franciscans gave their church and king a monopoly in the Florida country which latecomers would have to break."²



Speech of Juanillo

From the Spanish perspective, Juanillo was a troublemaker who would not give in to the priests' demand that he keep only one wife. When a position of mico (chief) came open, that post may have gone to this young Indian save for the intervention of Father Pedro Corpa. A sulking Juanillo sought revenge by murdering the

meddling friar; then he called on the natives of Guale to expunge the land of all Spanish influence.

Juanillo's speech to the Indians, justifying his behavior, is the first document below.

Now the friar is dead. This would not have happened if he had allowed us to live according to our pre-Christian manner. Let us return to our ancient customs. Let us provide for our defense against the punishment which the governor of Florida will mete out; if he succeeds in punishing us, he will be as rigorous in avenging the death of this single friar, as for the death of all. For he will punish us as severely for having killed one friar as if we had killed them all.

Consequently since the punishment for killing one friar must be equally severe as for killing all, let us restore our [ancient] liberty of which these friars deprive us. They give us promises of good things which they themselves have not seen but for which they hold out hope. We who are called Christians, experience only hindrances and vexations. They take away from us our women, allowing us but one, and that, in perpetuity, forbidding us to exchange them for others. They prohibit us from having our dances, banquets, feasts, celebrations, games and wars, in order that, being deprived of these, we might lose our ancient valor and skill, which we have inherited from our ancestors. They persecute our old men, calling them wizards. They are not satisfied with our labor for they hinder us from performing it on certain days. Even when we are willing to do all they tell us, they remain unsatisfied. All they do, is to reprimand us, treat us in an injurious manner, oppress us, preach to us and call us bad Christians. They deprive us of every vestige of happiness which our ancestors obtained for us, in exchange for which they hold out the hope of the joys of Heaven. In this deceitful manner, they subject us, holding us bound to their wills. What have we to hope for except to become slaves? If we kill them all now, we will throw off this intolerable yoke without delay. The governor will perceive our valor and will be forced to treat us well, in the event that he should get the better of us.³



Father Ávila's Narrative of His Captivity

In the clash of two cultures, the Spanish, of course, had another point of view. The missionaries were men who gave up everything of material value, risking life and

limb in the service of God and country. They clearly believed that their religion and culture were gifts of priceless value. The second document reproduced below is Father Ávila's written account of his captivity, as copied by Luis Hierónimo de Oré, O.F.M., *Relación de los mártires que ha habido en las Provincias de la Florida*, completed about 1617.

To relate once more how God delivered me from the hands of the Indians, I declare as follows: When they found me among the rushes where I had hid myself, they shot arrows at me. Then they held me for the period of an hour, leaving me with an Indian to guard me while the Indians were busy sacking and robbing the church and house. Soon there came the *cacique* who had liberated me, with three or four Indians, and at that hour of the night, they took me to their town which was two leagues from there, over a poor road. But since I was wounded, I could only walk with great difficulty; yet they urged me on, pretending they were taking me to their town to cure me and to provide for me. Finally, perhaps about twelve o'clock at night, we arrived where they threw me among some common reed-grass in the hut until morning. Some guards were placed over me, and I passed the time amid great annoyance. When morning arrived, the *cacique* came, despoiling me of my habit which I had, leaving me my undergarments. He said the habit was very bloody and he wanted to wash it. In the meanwhile I wore a small coat which he left with me. This is the clothing in which the Indians go about. So I was like an Indian with regard to my exterior, while all of them made fun of me and mocked me.

The *cacique* convoked all the boys and women, saying to them: "Come kiss the hand of your father; receive his blessing." Since we had taught them this good custom and mark of good breeding, the *cacique* commanded that they practice this custom on me in mockery. After the Indians had satisfied themselves by this amusement and had made fun of me, the *cacique* ordered that two Indians should tie my hands with a rope and take me to Tulafina, which was the first mission or post where I had been.⁴ It was distant six leagues through swamps and mire so that one had to go through them up to the hips. Moreover the Indians said that I had declared that the land of Tulafina was bad and that the Indians were very bad. "Therefore," said the *cacique*, "I wish you to go there; and they will treat you as you deserve." So with great cruelty they soon took me there, without considering my wounds. And since the roads were so bad, I fell at almost every step and stuck in the mire. For them it was the occasion of so much satisfaction and delight that they could not hide it, for they made fun of me with gestures and grimaces, and played with me by slapping me on the neck. If God had not given me sufficient strength and relief, this journey would have been

enough to bring on death, for I was sick and wounded. But God who wished to liberate me from their hands gave me sufficient strength to bear it.

At about four in the afternoon, we arrived at a very large town called Ufalage. This town is on the way to Tulafina. Many Indians, men and women, came out to meet me, all of whom were painted, and who made a great show and mockery of me. In this manner they took me to their hut where they made me sit down on the ground, while they all stood around laughing and ridiculing me. I was very tired and hungry and on this account I would have preferred to remain there that night. This, however, was not to their liking, so that night they took me to Tulafina because they alleged that the Indians there were awaiting me. Tulafina was distant two leagues from there. The journey was over a worse road than the previous one and in many parts, the water reached to the waist. Nevertheless, God gave me strength, and before nightfall we arrived at Tulafina. A little before arriving there we encountered a great number of painted Indians, their faces smeared with red earth, and fitted out with bows and arrows. They seemed to be numberless and looked like demons. They all came out to receive me, and amid great mockery and fun, led me to their habitation. When I arrived at the door of the hut, I found they had erected a large cross, while on one side there was a large whip which was a green rod with many branches which they use when at first they make the blood flow. On the other side of the cross was a rod to be used as a firebrand having a pine branch before it with the head-skin of a small animal. They commanded me to sit down at the foot of the cross. Thereupon they tied my hands; my arms being already bent because of the arrow shots in the shoulder, arm and hand. They also tied my neck strongly to the same cross so that they almost hung me. When this was done, a *cacique* came, who was the commander of the dwelling, and said: "Do you know what this is? The cross which is erected here, is an invention of yours so we shall have to place you on it. The torch is to be bound to your body to burn you; the whip is to beat you; and this skin which is here, is a sign that you have to die. Tomorrow all this will be put into execution." Then an Indian dressed in a chasuble, went about in mockery, mimicking the Mass. Another Indian came and placed a book before me and when I did not reverence it, a principal *cacique* came and with the book struck me on the head and cheek with a blow so hard that it left me senseless.

I was stark naked for they did not even let me have a poor coat. Another Indian came with a cord, one of those with which we gird ourselves, knotted and doubled, and gave me three or four strokes so hard that I was left like dead. While they were engaged in this, a *cacique* arose and carried a little bit of burning wood and threw it on my back. Since I was tied, I could not throw it from me very quickly. It left a deep mark on my body and caused me much pain. Soon the Indi-

ans began to dance around me as if they were passing in review before me, and if it struck someone's fancy, he gave me a heavy blow with a *macana* [club]. In this manner they danced for three hours, while they made a thousand incantations. When they were tired of dancing, they sat down a little and when I saw there was a little quiet, I asked them if they, for the love of God, would have the kindness to untie my arms for a little while (for they were in the bent position) and though they were going to kill me, I asked them to show this mercy to me. Just then they did not wish to heed my request, but they soon began to treat among themselves about showing me some mercy. They remembered that there was in the city of St. Augustine, a boy who was the heir to the caciquedom and they reasoned that if they would not kill me, they could sometime exchange him for me. Others said that those who had entered that hut were immune from death; still others said that the daughter of the sun had appeared to them and had told them that they should not kill me. This is one of their practices of witchcraft.

Finally, confronted with all these opinions, they decided to let me live and so a *cacique* arose and said to me: "Do you wish me to unbind you? Do you wish to live or die? We leave it in your hands. You may have what you wish. But I tell you that if we do not kill you, you will have to stay here among us, serving us by carrying water and wood, and by digging at times, and by attending to all that we tell you."

When the *cacique* said this to me, I was half dead. Nevertheless, I answered: "Do what you desire for my body is in your hands; but if you do not kill me, I shall do what you tell me and will be good, for you see that I cannot stir." This seemed good to him and I said much in a seasonable time. And so he untied me. Then they commanded me to sit down on the ground, having placed me against a bench. They gave me two *mazorquillas* of cooked maize to eat. But I was in such a condition that although it was good and substantial food, I could not eat it; but in order to satisfy them, I forced myself to eat. I asked them to give me one of those cane beds that I might sleep. This they did and placed an Indian with me who was to be in my presence in case I needed anything. But how could I sleep in those knotted canes, being naked and wounded and so ill-treated? I only say that unless God had given me strength, it would have been impossible to live. In this manner I was in this hut for ten days, while the Indians danced till midnight, without showing any desire to heal my wounds. But God who is merciful permitted that within a short time, without any curative means, they were healed and I became well.

Fairer days succeeded and they allowed me to go from one house to another, though always naked even during the worst cold of winter. I was the laughing-stock because when they held a feast, they sent for me and hurled nicknames

at me. Thus they received pleasure from the feast and they were glad they had not killed me so that they could have someone to entertain them. They made me dig and stand guard over the huts in order that the birds would not eat the grain. All had dominion over me; whoever wished, hit me with a stick. Particularly the boys employed their scorn upon me. I had suffered much hunger and need because the Indians had nothing to eat and if they had anything, they first attended to their needs, rather than to mine. And so often I found it necessary to satisfy my hunger and need on the leaves of wild grapes and plants having a sour juice, for in this land there were no better fruits.

They tried to use force on me to make me abandon my law and accept that of the Indians, and to marry an Indian after their manner. This I answered with contradiction and with great spirit and feeling, confounding the Indians in such a way that they marvelled at the spirit and liberty I used in speaking to them and in contradicting them. After that they tried to make me serve in cleaning the house of the demon, for such we call it. They, however, call it a tomb. There they placed food and drink for the dead which the dead are supposed to find at the morning meal. The Indians believe that the dead eat this food. However, they are already persuaded that the dead do not eat it, because the wizards eat it themselves, as they know by experience, for we have made this known to them. The same wizards themselves have confessed this and we have made good Christians of them. To this I answered that although they cut me to a thousand pieces, I would not enter that house but I would rather go and burn it. When they saw me so strong in my resolve, they left me.

When affairs reached this stage, the Indians wished to take the crown from me by saying: "You will never see the Spaniards again, nor they, you; leave your law and become an Indian and you will enjoy what we enjoy; you will have a wife or more, if you wish; furthermore, in the other life you will enjoy what you enjoy here, for we know that he who has been miserable and mean in this life, will be the same in the other, and as many wives as one had in this life, so many will he have in the other. This is our belief. Give up the things you teach us for they are foolish. Here we are bringing this Indian woman, young and beautiful; marry her and you will have a happy life and thus reward yourself." While they were speaking and acting in this manner, the Indian girl brought decayed palm leaves from the woods, similar to straws, made a bed for [me] and called [me] to dine. As soon as I saw this, I perceived the persecution of the devil who did not leave any occasion pass, in order to tempt me and make me disconsolate. I had recourse to God in prayer on this occasion and with tears that fell from my eyes, begged Him to give me the grace to deliver me from so diabolical a temptation. God gave me such persuasiveness and such spirit that by means of them

I convinced the Indians and in order to safeguard myself from all this, I fled to the woods where I remained for four days, sustaining myself on herbs and roots. Nor did I return to that town, but betook myself to another, and since then they never spoke to me of such things.

One day while I was going along leisurely, I passed by a hut where some Indians were digging. Under the inspiration of the devil, they took their heavy rods and six Indians conjointly gave me so many strokes that they left me for dead. This renewed my wounds and caused many new ones as well, but God was pleased that they should be healed in a short time without any curative means. Ten months I was in this state of captivity during which the Lord delivered me from great dangers, giving me such good health and strength that never in my life have I experienced the same.

On a certain occasion when the Indians had determined to declare war against some enemies of theirs, they came to him and said: "See, here we have ten arquebuses without powder and bullets. Make us some powder and bullets and if you do not we have to kill you." He excused himself, saying that he did not know how. To this the Indian answered: "Do not excuse yourself for you do know how; your books tell you how you can make them." Father Ávila answered: "I have no books because you have taken them from me." They said: "We shall bring them to you." Then they brought him a *Summa* and a prayer book for religious, those by Fray Luís de Granada, and a breviary, all of which were a great consolation for him in his solitude. He hid them in the cavity of an oak tree where he went to read them and to console himself with their contents. The breviary, however, he always carried publicly but the boys tore out the pages. In order to answer them in this matter of the powder and bullets concerning which they molested him and pressed him, he asked for the necessary materials of which there were none in that country. Thus they understood that it was not because he was unwilling, but for lack of the materials, that he failed to make them. And so they left him.

This story of the powder and bullets, Father Ávila did not write in his *Relacion* but it was given to me by a religious who dealt with Father Ávila before and after his captivity and who spoke and conferred with him a great deal. He relates this incident and divers others, which I pass over in order to avoid prolixity.⁵

NOTES

1. Barbara King, "'Georgia Martyrs' Changing Lives," *The Georgia Bulletin*, October 21, 1993, p. 1.

2. Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 40–41.
3. The source for this remarkable oration is Andres G. Barcía Carbillido y Zuniga, *Ensayo cronológico para la historia general de la Florida* (Madrid, 1737), translated by Rev. Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., for his doctoral dissertation, *The Franciscan Conquest of Florida (1573–1618)* (Catholic University of America, 1937). Geiger maintains (p. 90), “this speech may be only ‘poetically true,’ but it certainly characterizes the situation.” A similar version comes from the Indian Lucas of Tupique in his confession to Spanish authorities at St. Augustine shortly after the uprising. Lucas asserted that the Indian leaders killed one of the priests “because he was artful and took away their enchantment or witchcraft, and would not allow them to have more than one wife.” Another Indian captive, Bartolomé of Tolomato, attributed the killings to the fact that the priests “reproved them [the Indians]; that the priests were crafty, and did not care for them, and did not wish to have more than one wife.” See Miss A. M. Brooks and Mrs. Annie Averette, *The Unwritten History of Old St. Augustine* (St. Augustine: The Record Co. [1909?]), 41, 46.
4. According to John Tate Lanning, Father Ávila’s mission was on Jekyll Island (called Ospo at the time). Tulafina was apparently near the Altamaha River, not far inland from the present city of Darien. *The Spanish Missions of Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 71, 253.
5. Again, the translator is Maynard Geiger, who published Ore’s important work under the title *The Martyrs of Florida (1513–1616)* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1936).