



The River of Corn: Conquistadors Clash with Native Americans

John Rose Putnam

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A great civilization led by a beautiful queen

A magnificent temple covered in pearls

A ruthless conquistador lusting for gold

Who were the Chicora?

What happened to them?

In 1540 Hernando de Soto and 600 Spanish conquistadors crossed the Savannah River into what is now South Carolina and thus entered the empire of the Chicora, the largest and most powerful Native Indian civilization in the American Southeast. While Cofitachique, the lost city of the Chicora, is regarded as the gem of Southern archaeology, no trace of it has yet been found.

The beautiful woman who was the leader of the Chicora took Soto to a huge temple sitting high above an adjoining river. It was adorned with pearls and seashells and filled with the remains of the honored Chicora dead, but Soto and the Spanish could not find the gold they craved. Food was also in short supply. Tensions grew between the natives and the invaders. In order to prevent a war the Queen offered a supply of corn from a nearby city if the Spanish would leave her realm. Soto agreed but then took the Queen hostage and headed for the Blue Mountains of the Chalaque.

Meanwhile the Chalaque, blood enemies of the Chicora, plotted to take over the fertile fields along the River of Corn that flowed past the city of Cofitachique. As soon as the Spanish invaders left the land of the Chicora, the Chalaque would attack from their villages near the Blue Mountains and take for their own the bounty of the River of Corn. This was a time of great trouble for the Chicora.

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