

The Expedition of HERNANDO DE SOTO

in southeastern North America, 1539-1543

as recounted by a member of the expedition, in

A true relation of the vicissitudes that attended the Governor Don Hernando de Soto and some nobles of Portugal in the discovery of the region of Florida . . . by a Fidalgo [Gentleman] of Elvas [town in Portugal], 1557. Excerpts.

In order to convey the physical and experiential expanse of the expedition, from its initial landing in 1539 with over 600 men, to the arrival of 300 desperate survivors in Mexico four years later, excerpts are presented here from all chapters relating to the mainland expedition.

Ch 7. HOW WE LEFT HAVANA AND CAME TO FLORIDA, AND WHAT OTHER MATTERS TOOK PLACE.

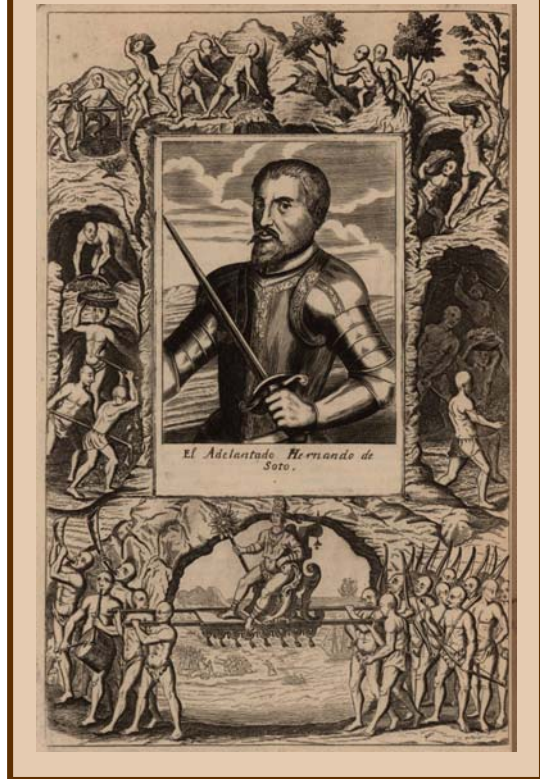
. . . On Sunday, the 18th day of May, in the year 1539 the Adelantado [Governor] sailed from Havana [Cuba] with a fleet of nine vessels, five of them ships, two caravels, two pinnaces; and he ran seven days with favorable weather.

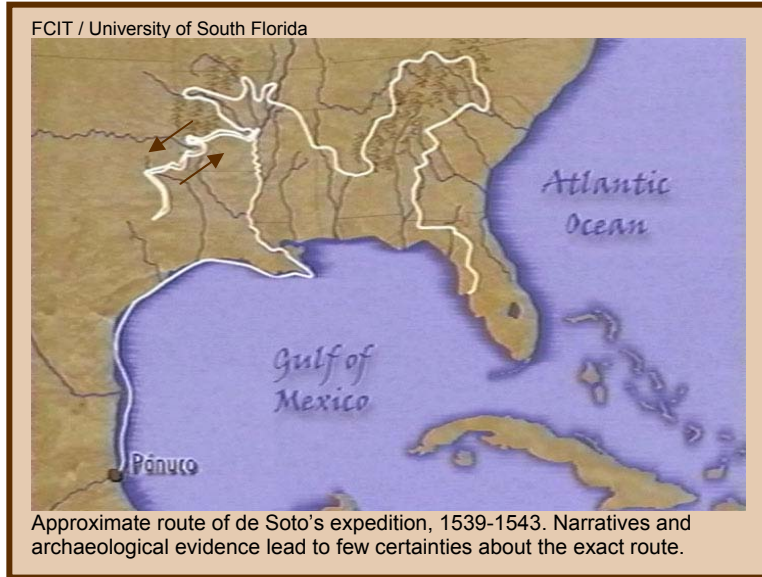
On the 25th of the month, being the festival of Espiritu Santo [Pentecost], the land was seen, and anchor cast a league [three miles] from shore because of the shoals. On Friday, the 30th, the army landed in Florida, two leagues from the town of an Indian chief named Ucita. . . .

So soon as the people were come to land, the camp was pitched on the seaside near the bay, which goes up close to the town. Presently the Captain-General, Vasco Porcallo, taking seven horsemen with him, [went] up the country half a league about and discovered six Indians who tried to resist him with arrows, the weapons they are accustomed to use. The horsemen killed two and the four others escaped, the country being obstructed by bushes and ponds in which the horses bogged and fell with their riders, of weakness from the voyage. At night the Governor, with a hundred men in the pinnaces, came upon a deserted town; for, so soon as the Christians [Spaniards] appeared in sight of land, they were descried [seen from the distance by the Indians], and all along on the coast many smokes [fires] were seen to rise which the Indians make to warn one another. . . .



Hernando de Soto, in Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Océano*, 1728 edition (orig. publ. 1601)





Ch. 8. OF SOME [ATTACKS] THAT WERE MADE, AND HOW A CHRISTIAN WAS FOUND WHO HAD BEEN A LONG TIME IN THE POSSESSION OF A CACIQUE [Indian leader].

. . . When Baltasar de Gallegos came into the open field, he discovered ten or eleven Indians among whom was a Christian, naked and sunburnt, his arms tattooed after their manner, and he in no respect differing from them. As soon as the horsemen came in sight, they ran upon the Indians who fled, hiding themselves in a thicket, though

not before two or three of them were overtaken and wounded. The Christian, seeing a horseman coming upon him with a lance, began to cry out: "Do not kill me, cavalier; I am a Christian! Do not slay these people; they have given me my life!" Directly he called to the Indians, putting them out of fear, when they left the wood and came to him. The horsemen took up the Christian and Indians behind them on their beasts, and, greatly rejoicing, got back to the Governor at nightfall. . . .

Ch. 9. HOW THE CHRISTIAN CAME TO THE LAND OF FLORIDA, WHO HE WAS, AND OF WHAT PASSED AT HIS INTERVIEW WITH THE GOVERNOR. [Juan Ortiz, survivor of the 1527-28 Narváez expedition to Florida, was captured by the Indians with whom he then lived for twelve years.]

. . . By command of Ucita, Juan Ortiz was bound hand and foot to four stakes and laid upon scaffolding, beneath which a fire was kindled that he might be burned; but a daughter of the Chief entreated that he might be spared. Though one Christian, she said, might do no good, certainly he could do no harm, and it would be an honor to have one for a captive; to which the father acceded, [ordering] the injuries to be healed. When Ortiz got well, he was put to watching a temple, that the wolves in the nighttime might not carry off the dead there, which charge he took in hand, having commended himself to God. . . .

Ch. 10. HOW THE GOVERNOR, HAVING SENT THE SHIPS TO CUBA, MARCHED INLAND, LEAVING ONE HUNDRED MEN AT THE PORT.

. . . The Governor sent two men on horseback with word to those in the rear that they should advance rapidly, for that the way was becoming toilsome and the provisions were [few]. He came to Cale and found the town abandoned, but he seized three spies and [waited] there until the people should arrive, they travelling hungry and on bad roads, the country being very thin of maize [corn], low, very wet, pondy, and thickly covered with trees. . . .

Ch. 11. HOW THE GOVERNOR ARRIVED AT CALIQUEN, AND THEN, TAKING THE CACIQUE WITH HIM, CAME TO NAPETACA WHERE THE INDIANS, ATTEMPTING TO RESCUE HIM, HAD MANY OF THEIR NUMBER KILLED AND CAPTURED.

On the eleventh day of August in the year 1539, the Governor left Cale and arrived to sleep at a small town called Ytara, and the next day at another called Potano, and the third at Utinama, and then at another named Malapaz [north central Florida]. This place was so called because one, representing himself to be its Cacique, came peacefully, saying that he wished to serve the Governor with his people, and asked that he would [order] the twenty-eight men and women, prisoners taken the night before, to be [freed]; that provisions should be brought and that he would

furnish a guide for the country in advance of us; whereupon, the Governor having ordered the prisoners to be [set free] and the Indian put under guard, the next day in the morning came many natives close to a scrub surrounding the town, near which the prisoner asked to be taken that he might speak and satisfy them, as they would obey in whatever he commanded; but no sooner had he found himself close to them than he boldly [ran] away and fled so swiftly that no one could overtake him, going off with the rest into the woods. The Governor ordered a bloodhound, already fleshed upon him [having his scent], to be let loose, which, passing by many, seized upon the faithless Cacique and held him until the Christians had come up. . . .



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Paynes Prairie, north central Florida

Ch. 12. HOW THE GOVERNOR ARRIVED AT PALACHE [near present-day Tallahassee] AND WAS INFORMED THAT THERE WAS MUCH GOLD INLAND.

. . . Two captains having been sent in opposite directions in quest of Indians, a hundred men and women were taken [captive], one or two of whom were chosen out for the Governor, as was always customary for officers to do after successful [attacks],

dividing the others among themselves and companions. They were led off in chains, with collars about the neck, to carry [baggage] and grind corn, doing the labor proper to servants. Sometimes it happened that, going with them for wood or maize, they would kill the Christian and flee with the chain on, which others would file at night with a splinter of stone, in the place of iron, at which work, when caught, they were punished as a warning to others and that they might not do the like. The women and youths, when [taken away] a hundred leagues [300 miles] from their country, no longer cared, and were taken along loose [not in chains], doing the work, and in a very little time learning the Spanish language. . . . [The expedition set up its winter encampment in this region for the winter of 1539-1540.]

Ch. 13. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM APALACHE IN QUEST OF YUPAHA, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.

. . . The Governor left Toalli [central Georgia] on the twenty-fourth day of March and arrived on Thursday in the evening at a little stream where a small bridge was made, and the people passed to the opposite side. Benito Fernandes, a Portuguese, fell off from it and was drowned. As soon as the Governor had crossed, he found a town a short way on by the name of Achese, the people of which, having had no knowledge of the Christians, plunged into a river; nevertheless some men and women were taken, . . . By one of the Indians taken there, the Governor sent to call the Cacique from the farther side of the river, who, having come to him, thus spoke:

VERY HIGH, POWERFUL, AND GOOD MASTER: The things that seldom happen bring astonishment. Think, then, what must be the effect on me and mine, the sight of you and your people, whom we have at no time seen, astride the fierce brutes, your horses, entering with such speed and fury into my country, that we had no tidings of your coming — things so altogether new as to strike awe and terror to our hearts, which it was not nature to resist, so that we should receive you with the sobriety due to so kingly and

famous a lord. Trusting to your greatness and personal qualities, I hope no fault will be found in me and that I shall rather receive favors, of which one is that with my person, my country, and my vassals, you will do as with your own things; and another, that you tell me who you are, whence you come, [where] you go, and what it is you seek, that I may the better serve you.

The Governor responded that he greatly thanked him for his good will, as much so as though he had given him a great treasure. He told him that he was the child of the Sun, coming from its abode, and that he was going about the country seeking for the greatest prince there and the richest region. The Cacique stated that farther on was a great lord whose territory was called Ocute. He gave him a guide who understood the language to [lead him there], and the Governor commanded his [Indians] to be released. . . .



Ch. 14. HOW THE GOVERNOR LEFT THE REGION OF PATOFA, MARCHING INTO A DESERT COUNTRY, WHERE HE, WITH HIS PEOPLE, BECAME EXPOSED TO GREAT PERIL AND UNDERWENT SEVERE [DE]PRIVATION. [April 1540]

. . . The next day there was a variety of opinion about the course proper to take, whether to return or do otherwise. The country through which they had come remained wasted and without maize; the grain they had

so far brought with them was [gone]; the [horses], like the men, were become very lean; and it was held very doubtful whether relief was anywhere to be found: moreover, it was the opinion that they might be beaten by any Indians who should venture to attack them, so that continuing thus, whether by hunger or in strife, they must inevitably be overcome. . . .

. . . [De Soto] set out for Cutifachiqui, capturing three Indians in the road who stated that the [woman leader] of that country had already information of the Christians and was waiting for them in a town. He sent to her by one of them, offering his friendship and announcing his approach. [As soon] as the Governor arrived, four canoes came towards him, in one of which was a kinswoman of the Cacica, who, coming near, addressed him in these words:

EXCELLENT LORD: My sister sends me to salute you and to say that the reason why she has not come in person is that she has thought to serve you better by remaining to give orders on the other shore; and that, in a short time, her canoes will all be here in readiness to conduct you there, where you may take your [rest] and be obeyed.

The Governor thanked her, and she returned to cross the river. After a little time the Cacica came out of the town, seated in a chair, which some principal men having [carried] to the bank, she entered a canoe. Over the stern was spread an awning and in the bottom lay extended a mat where were two cushions, one above the other, upon which she sat; and she was accompanied by her chief men in other canoes with Indians. She approached the spot where the Governor was and, being arrived, thus addressed him:

EXCELLENT LORD: Be this coming to these your shores most happy. My ability can in no way equal my wishes, nor my services become the merits of so great a prince; nevertheless, good wishes are to be valued more than all the treasures of the earth without

them. With sincerest and purest good will I [offer] you my person, my lands, my people, and make you these small gifts.

The Cacica presented much clothing of the country, from the shawls and skins that came in the other boats; and drawing from over her head a large string of pearls, she threw them about his neck, exchanging with him many gracious words of friendship and courtesy. She directed that canoes should come to the spot where the Governor and his people passed to the opposite side of the river. As soon as he was lodged in the town, a great many turkeys were sent to him. The country was delightful and fertile, having good interval lands upon the streams; the forest was open, with abundance of walnut and mulberry trees. The sea was [said] to be two days' travel. About the place, from half a league to a league off, were large vacant towns, grown up in grass, that appeared as if no people had lived in them for a long time. The Indians said that, two years before, there had been a pest[ilence] in the land, and the inhabitants had moved away to other towns. . . .



To all it appeared well to make a settlement there, the [region] being a favorable one, to which could come all the ships from New Spain [Mexico], Peru, Santa Marta [Colombia], and Tierra-Firme [northern coast of South America], going to Spain; because it is [on] the way there, is a good country, and one fit in which to raise supplies; but Soto, as it was his object to find another treasure like that of Atabalipa, lord of Peru, would not be content with good lands nor pearls, even though many of them were worth their weight in

gold. . . . The natives were asked if they had knowledge of any great [Indian leader] farther on, to which they answered that twelve days' travel [in that direction] was a region called Chiaha, subject to a chief of Coça.

The Governor then resolved at once to go in [search] of that country, and being an inflexible man and dry of word, who, although he liked to know what the others all thought and had to say, after he once said a thing he did not like to be opposed, and as he ever acted as he thought best, all bent to his will; for though it seemed an error to leave that country, when another might have been found about it, on which all the people could have been sustained until the crops had been made and the grain gathered, there were none who would say a thing to him after it became known that he had made up his mind.

Ch. 15. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM CUTIFACHIQUI IN QUEST OF COÇA, AND WHAT OCCURRED TO HIM ON THE JOURNEY. [May-June 1540]

. . . . A Cacique of Acoste who came to see the Governor, after [offering] his services and they had exchanged compliments and proffers of friendship, was asked if he had any information of a rich land; he answered yes: that towards the north there was a region called Chisca, and that a forge was there for copper or other metal of that color, though brighter, having a much finer hue, and was to appearances much better, but was not so much used, for being softer; which was the statement that had been given in Cutifachiqui, where we had seen some chopping knives that were said to have a mixture of gold. . . .

Ch. 16. THE GOVERNOR LEFT CHIAHA AND, HAVING RUN A HAZARD OF FALLING BY THE HANDS OF THE INDIANS AT ACOSTE, ESCAPED BY HIS ADDRESS: WHAT OCCURRED TO HIM ON THE ROUTE AND HOW HE CAME TO COÇA. [July 1540]

... They travelled six days, passing by many towns [ruled by] the Cacique of Coça, and as they entered those territories, numerous messengers came from him on the road every day to the Governor, some going, others coming, until they arrived at Coça on Friday the sixteenth of July. The Cacique came out to receive him at the distance of two crossbowshot from the town, [carried] in a litter on the shoulders of his principal men, seated on a cushion, and covered with a mantle of marten skins of the size and shape of a woman's shawl: on his head he wore a [crown of feathers], and he was surrounded by many attendants playing upon flutes and singing. . . .



E. Jackson / University of Georgia

Northwest Georgia mountains (Cloudland Canyon)

Ch. 17. OF HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM COÇA TO TASTALUCA.

[Aug.-Oct. 1540]

... The Governor marched three days, the last one of them continually through an inhabited region, arriving on Monday, the eighteenth day of October, at Mauilla [Mabilla/Mobile, Alabama]. He rode forward in the vanguard [soldiers marching in the front of an army] with fifteen cavalry and thirty infantry, when a Christian he had sent with a message to the Cacique three or four

days before, with orders not to be gone long, and to discover the [attitude] of the Indians, came out from the town and reported that they appeared to him to be making preparation [for battle]; for that while he was present many weapons were brought and many people came into the town, and work had gone on rapidly to strengthen the palisade. Luis de Moscoso said that, since the Indians were so evil disposed, it would be better to stop in the woods; to which the Governor answered that he was impatient of sleeping out[side] and that he would lodge in the town.

Arriving near, the Chief came out to receive him with many Indians singing and playing on flutes, and after [offering] his services, gave him three cloaks of marten skins. The Governor entered the town with the Caciques, seven or eight men of his guard, and three or four cavalry who had dismounted to accompany them, and they seated themselves in a [courtyard]. The Cacique of Tastaluca asked the Governor to allow him to remain there and not to weary him any more with walking; but, finding that was not to be permitted, he changed his plan and, under pretext of speaking with some of the chiefs, he got up from where he sat by the side of the Governor and entered a house where were many Indians with their bows and arrows. The Governor, finding that he did not return, called to him: to which the Cacique answered that he would not come out nor would he leave that town, that if the Governor wished to go in peace, he should [leave] at once and not persist in carrying him away by force from his country. . . .

Ch. 18. HOW THE INDIANS ROSE UPON THE GOVERNOR, AND WHAT FOLLOWED UPON THAT RISING.

The Governor, in view of the determination and furious answer of the Cacique, thought to soothe him with soft words, to which he made no answer but, with great haughtiness and contempt,

withdrew to where Soto could not see nor speak to him. The Governor, that he might send word to the Cacique for him to remain in the country at his will and to be pleased to give him a guide and persons to carry burdens, that he might see if he could pacify him with gentle words, called to a chief who was passing by. The Indian replied, loftily, that he would not listen to him. Baltasar de Gallegos, who was near, seized him by the cloak of marten skins that he had on, drew it off over his head and left it in his hands; whereupon, the Indians all beginning to rise, he gave him a stroke with

a cutlass that laid open his back, when they, with loud yells, came out of the houses, discharging their bows.

The Governor, discovering that if he remained there they could not escape, and if he should order his men, who were outside of the town, to come in, the horses might be killed by the Indians from the houses and great injury done, he ran out; but before he could get away he fell two or three times and was helped to rise by those with him. He and they were all badly wounded: within the town five Christians were instantly killed. Coming



forth, he called out to all his men to get farther off, because there was much harm doing from the palisade. The natives discovering that the Christians were [retreating], and some, if not the greater number, at more than a walk, the Indians followed with great boldness, shooting at them or striking down such as they could overtake. Those in chains having set down their burdens near the fence while the Christians were [retreating], the people of Mauilla lifted the loads on to their backs and, bringing them into the town, took off their irons, putting bows and arms in their hands with which to fight. Thus did the foe come into possession of all the clothing, pearls, and whatever else the Christians had beside, which was what their Indians carried. . . .

Ch. 19. HOW THE GOVERNOR SENT HIS MEN IN ORDER OF BATTLE AND ENTERED THE TOWN OF MAUILLA. [Mobile, Alabama]

. . . The Governor, informed that the Indians were leaving the town, commanded the cavalry to surround it, . . . at the signal the four squadrons, at their proper points, [began a furious attack] and, both sides severely suffering, the Christians entered the town. The friar, the priest, and the rest who were with them in the house were all saved, though at the cost of the lives of two brave and very able men who went to their rescue. The Indians fought with so great spirit that they many times drove or people back out of the town. The struggle lasted so long that many Christians, weary and very thirsty, went to drink at a pond near by, tinged with the blood of the killed, and returned to the combat. The Governor, witnessing this, with those who followed him in the returning charge of the footmen, entered the town on horseback, which gave opportunity to fire the dwellings; then breaking in upon the Indians and beating them down, they fled out of the place, the cavalry and infantry driving them back through the gates, where, losing the hope of escape, they fought valiantly; and the Christians getting among them with cutlasses, they found themselves met on all sides by their strokes, when many, dashing headlong into the flaming houses, were smothered, and, heaped one upon another, burned to death.

They who perished there were in all two thousand five hundred, a few more or less: of the

Christians there fell eighteen, . . . Of the living, one hundred and fifty Christians had received seven hundred wounds from the arrow, and God was pleased that they should be healed in little time of very dangerous injuries. Twelve horses died, and seventy were hurt. . . .

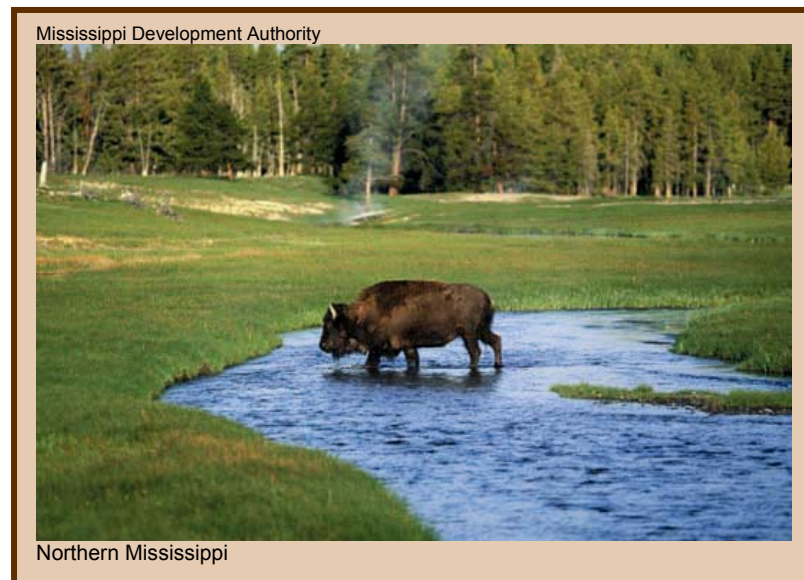
Ch. 20. HOW THE GOVERNOR SET OUT FROM MAUILLA TO GO TO CHICAÇA AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. [November 1540-early March 1541]

From the time the Governor arrived in Florida until he went from Mauilla, there died one hundred and two Christians, some of sickness, others by the hand of the Indians. . . .

So soon as March had come the Governor, having determined to leave Chicaça, asked two hundred tamemes [porters to carry the Spaniards' provisions] of the Cacique, who told him that he would confer with his chiefs. Tuesday, the eighth, he went where the Cacique was to ask for the carriers and was told that he would send them the next day. When the Governor saw the Chief, he said to Luis de Moscoso that the Indians did not appear right to him; that a very careful watch should be kept that night, to which the Field Marshal paid little attention. At four o'clock in the morning the Indians fell upon them in for squadrons, from as many quarters, and directly as they were discovered, they beat a drum. With loud shouting, they came in such haste, that they entered the camp at the same moment with some scouts that had been out; of which, by the time those in the town were aware, half the houses were in flames. . . . Three Christians came out of the fire in so bad plight, that one of them died in three days from that time, and the two others for a long while were carried in their pallets, on poles borne on the shoulders of Indians, for otherwise they could not have got along. There died in this affair eleven Christians, and fifty horses. One hundred of the swine remained, four hundred having been destroyed, from the conflagration of Mauilla. . . .

Ch. 21. HOW THE INDIANS RETURNED TO ATTACK THE CHRISTIANS, AND HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT TO ALIMAMU, AND THEY [WAITED] TO GIVE HIM BATTLE IN THE WAY. [March-April 1541]

. . . Juan de Añasco, the Comptroller, went with fifteen horse and forty foot[men] on the course the Governor would have to march and found a staked fort where the Indians were awaiting them. . . . As soon as they saw the Christians draw near they beat drums and, with loud yells, in great fury



came forth to meet them. As to Juan de Añasco and others, it appeared well to avoid them and, to inform the Governor, they [retreated] over an even ground in sight, the distance of a crossbow-shot from the enclosure, the footmen, the crossbow-men, and targeteers putting themselves before those on horseback, that the beasts might not be wounded by the Indians who came forth by sevens and eights to discharge their bows at them and retire. In sight of

the Christians they made a fire and, taking an Indian by the head and feet, pretended to give him many blows on the head and cast him into the flames, signifying in this way what they would do with the Christians. . . .



Ch. 22. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM QUIZOUIZ AND FROM THERE TO THE RIVER GRANDE. [Mississippi River / May-June 1541]

. . . The next day, while [de Soto] was hoping to see the Chief, many Indians came with bows and arrows to [attack] the Christians, when he commanded that all the armed horsemen should be mounted and in readiness. Finding them prepared, the Indians stopped at the distance of a crossbow-shot from where the Governor was, near a river-bank, where, after remaining quietly half an hour, six chiefs arrived at the camp, stating that they had come to find out what people it might be; for that they had [been told by] their ancestors that they were to be [conquered] by a white race; they consequently desired to return to the Cacique to tell him that he should come [right away] to obey and serve the Governor. After presenting six or seven skins and shawls brought with them, they [left] and returned with the others who were waiting for them by the shore. The Cacique came not, nor sent another message. . . .

[28 June 1541: crossing of the Mississippi River]

During the thirty days that were passed there, four piraguas [small canoe-like boats] were built, into three of which one morning, three hours before daybreak, the Governor ordered twelve cavalry to enter, four in each, men in whom he had confidence that they would [reach the other shore despite] the Indians and secure the passage or die: he also sent some crossbow men of foot with them, and in the other piragua, oarsmen to take them to the opposite shore. He ordered Juan de Guzman to cross with the infantry, of which he had remained Captain in the place of Francisco Maldonado; and because the current was stiff they went up along the side of the river a quarter of a league, and in

passing over they were carried down so as to land opposite the camp; but, before arriving there, at twice the distance of a stone's cast, the horsemen rode out from the piraguas to an open area of hard and even ground, where they all reached without accident. . . .

Ch. 23. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM AQUIXO TO CASQUI AND FROM THERE TO PACAHA; AND HOW THIS COUNTRY DIFFERS FROM THE OTHER.

The Rio Grande [Mississippi River] being crossed, the Governor marched a league and a half to a large town of Aquixo, which was abandoned before his arrival. Over a plain thirty Indians were seen to draw near, sent by the Cacique, to discover what the Christians intended to do, but who fled [as soon] as they saw them. The cavalry pursued, killed ten, and captured fifteen. . . .

The Governor marched two days through the country of Casqui before coming to the town where the Cacique was, the greater part of the way lying through fields thickly set with great towns, two or three of them to be seen from one. He sent word by an Indian to the Cacique that he was coming to obtain his friendship and to consider him as a brother; to which he received for answer that he would be welcomed; . . .

. . . The Cacique went to his town and returned with many Indians singing who, when they had

come to where the Governor was, all [lay down before him]. Among them were two blind men. The Cacique made an address, of which, as it was long, I will give the substance in a few words. He said that since the Governor was son of the Sun, he begged him to restore sight to those Indians: whereupon the blind men arose and they very earnestly entreated him to do so. Soto answered them that in the heavens above there was One who had the power to make them whole and do whatever they could ask of Him, whose servant he was; that this great Lord made the sky and the earth, and man after His image; that He had suffered on the tree of the true cross to save the human race and risen from the grave on the third day — what of man there was of Him dying, what of divinity being immortal, and that, having ascended into heaven, He was there with open arms to receive all that would be converted to Him. . . .

Ch. 24. OF HOW THE CACIQUE OF PACAHA CAME IN PEACE, AND HE OF CASQUI, HAVING [LEFT], RETURNED TO EXCUSE HIS CONDUCT; AND HOW THE GOVERNOR MADE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE CHIEFS. [June 1541]

On Wednesday, the nineteenth day of June, the Governor entered Pacaha, and took [lodging] in the town where the Cacique [lived]. . . .

The Cacique came the next day, followed by many Indians, with a large gift of fish, skins, and shawls. He made a speech that all were glad to hear, and concluded by saying that although his lordship had causelessly inflicted injury on his country and his [people], he did not any the less cease to be his and was always at his command. The Governor ordered his brother to be let go and some principal men he held captives. That day a messenger arrived from Casqui saying that his master would come early on the [next day] to excuse the error he had committed in going away without his [permission]; to which the Governor [told him to say] in return to the Cacique that, if he did not come himself in person, he would go after him and inflict the punishment he deserved.

The Chief of Casqui came the next day, and after presenting many shawls, skins, and fish, he gave the Governor a daughter, saying that his greatest desire was to unite his blood with that of so great a [leader] as he was, begging that he would take her to wife. He made a long and discreet oration, full of praise of Soto, and concluded by asking his forgiveness, for the love of that cross he had left, for having gone off without his permission; . . .



Ch. 25. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM PACAHA TO AQUIGUATE AND TO COLIGOA, AND CAME TO CAYAS. [July-August 1541]

. . . From Tascaluça to the River Grande may be three hundred leagues [900 miles]; a region very low, having many lakes: from Pacha to Quiguate there may be one hundred and ten leagues. . . .

The inhabitants of Coligoa had never heard of the Christians and when these

got so near their town as to be seen, they fled up stream along a river that passed near by there, some throwing themselves into the water, from which they were taken by their pursuers, who, on either bank, captured many of both sexes and the Cacique with the rest. Three days from that time

came many Indians by his order with offerings of shawls, deerskins, and two cowhides [buffalo skins]: they stated that at the distance of five or six leagues towards the north were many cattle where the country, being cold, was thinly inhabited, and that, to the best of their knowledge, the region that was better provisioned than any other and more populous was one to the south called Cayas. . . .

Ch. 26. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT TO VISIT THE REGION OF TULLA, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. [Autumn 1541]

The Governor [spent] a month in the Region of Cayas. In this time the horses fattened and throve more than they had done at other places in a longer time, in consequence of the large quantity of maize there. The blade of it, I think, is the best fodder that grows. . . .

. . . Three days later he marched to Tulla, bringing with him the Cacique, among whose Indians he was unable to find one who spoke the language of that place. He was three days on the way, and at his arrival found the town abandoned, the inhabitants not venturing to remain for him. But no sooner did they know that he was in the town, than, at four o'clock on the morning of the first night, they came upon him in two squadrons from different directions with bows and arrows and with long staves like pikes. . . . Some Christians and some horses were injured. Many of the Indians were killed.

Of those made captive, the Governor sent six to the Cacique, their right hands and their noses cut off, with the message that if he did not come to him to apologize and render obedience, he would go in pursuit, . . . Three Indians came the next day with loads of cowskins, and three days afterward came twenty others. Among them was one who understood [the language of the people of] Cayas. After a long oration from him, of apologies for the Cacique and in praise of the Governor, he concluded by saying that he with the others had come in behalf of the Chief to inquire what his

lordship would command, for that he was ready to serve him. . . .

Ch. 27. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM TULLA TO AUTIAMQUE, WHERE HE PASSED THE WINTER. [Autumn 1541-Winter 1541-42]

. . . The winter was already come. The cold, rain, and snow did not permit the people to travel for two or three months in the year, and the Governor feared to remain among that sparse population, lest his [men could not be fed] for that length of time.

Moreover, the Indians said that near Autiamque was a great [body of] water, which, from their account, appeared to him to be an arm of the sea. Hence, he determined to winter in that region and in the following summer to go to

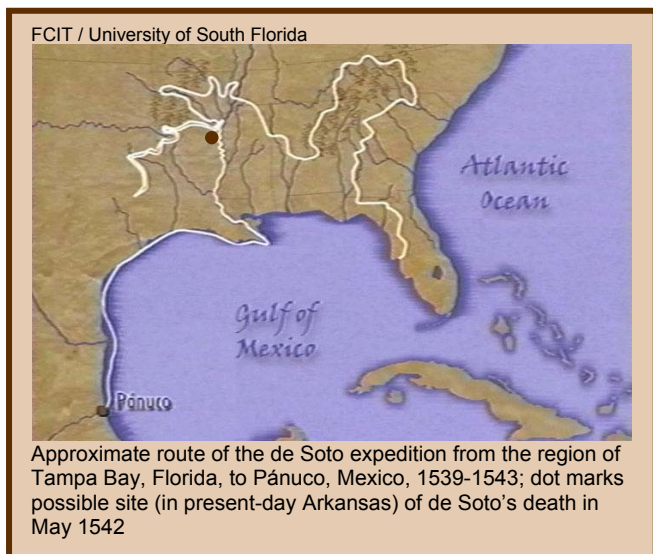
John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Theodore de Bry, engraving in 1598 edition of *Brief Account*

“Of [de Soto in Florida] we have had no news these three years. This we are sure of, that at the beginning he carried himself very cruelly; and if he be alive, most assuredly he hath destroy'd an infinite number of people; for he among all those who have done most mischief in ruining both Regions and King-doms, is famous for his Savage fury; wherefore I am apt to believe that God hath put the same end to his life, as to the others.”

Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, written 1542, published 1552

the seaside where he would build two brigantines [ships] — one to send to Cuba, the other to New Spain [Mexico], that the arrival of either might [bring news] of him. Three years had elapsed since he had been heard of by Doña Isabel [de Soto’s wife in Cuba] or by any person in a civilized community. Two hundred and fifty men of his were dead, likewise one hundred and fifty horses. . . The Christians stayed three months in Autiamque, enjoying the greatest plenty of maize, beans, walnuts, and dried ameixas [plums]. . . .



Ch. 28. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM AUTIAMQUE TO NILCO, AND THENCE TO CUACHOYA. [March-April 1542]

On Monday, the sixth day of March, of the year 1542 of the Christian era, the Governor set out from Autiamque to seek Nilco, which the Indians said was near the River Grande [Mississippi River] with the purpose, by going to the sea, to recruit his forces. He had not over three hundred efficient men nor more than forty horses. . . .

Juan Ortiz died in Autiamque, a loss the Governor greatly regretted, for without an interpreter, not knowing [where] he was travelling, Soto feared to enter the

country lest he might get lost. Thenceforth a lad taken in Cutifachiqui, who had learned somewhat of the language of the Christians, served as the interpreter. . . .

Ch. 29. THE MESSAGE SENT TO QUIGALTAM, AND THE ANSWER BROUGHT BACK TO THE GOVERNOR, AND WHAT OCCURRED THE WHILE. [Spring 1542]

. . . The Governor sank into a deep despondency at sight of the difficulties that presented themselves to his reaching the sea; and, what was worse, from the way in which the men and horses were diminishing in numbers, he could not sustain himself in the country without [help]. . . . [H]e sent a messenger to the Cacique of Quigaltam to say that he was the child of the Sun and from where he came all obeyed him, [offering] their tribute; that he besought him to value his friendship and to come where he was, that he would be rejoiced to see him, and in token of love and his obedience he must bring him something from his country that was in most esteem there. By the same Indian, the Chief returned this answer:

As to what you say of your being the son of the Sun, if you will cause him to dry up the great river, I will believe you: as to the rest, it is not my custom to visit any one, but rather all, of whom I have ever heard, have come to visit me, to serve and obey me, and pay me tribute, either voluntarily or by force: if you desire to see me, come where I am; if for peace, I will receive you with special good will; if for war, I will await you in my town; but neither for you, nor for any man, will I set back one foot.

When the messenger returned, the Governor was already low, being very ill of fevers. He grieved that he was not in a state to cross the river at once and go in quest of the Cacique to see if he could not abate that pride. . . .

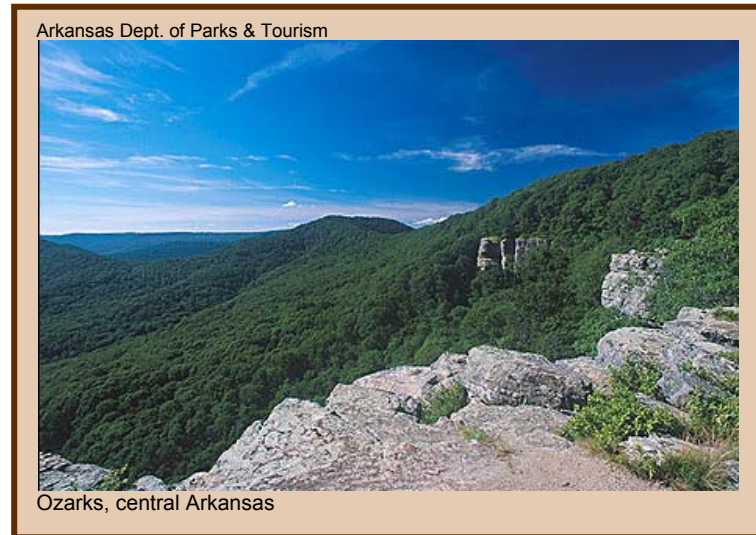
Ch. 30. THE DEATH OF THE ADELANTADO, DON HERNANDO DE SOTO, AND HOW LUIS MOSCOSO DE ALVARADO WAS CHOSEN GOVERNOR. [May 1542]

The Governor, conscious that the hour approached in which he should depart this life, commanded that all the King’s officers should be called before him, the captains and the principal personages,

to whom he made a speech. He said that he was about to go into the presence of God, to give account of all his past life; and since He had been pleased to take him away at such a time, and when he could recognize the moment of his death, he, His most unworthy servant, rendered Him hearty thanks. . . The next day, the twenty-first of May, departed this life the magnanimous, the virtuous, the intrepid Captain, Don Hernando de Soto, Governor of Cuba and Adelantado of Florida. . . .

Luis de Moscoso determined to conceal what had happened from the Indians, for Soto had [led] them to understand that the Christians were immortal; besides, they held him to be vigilant, sagacious, brave, and, although they were at peace, should they know him to be dead, they, being of their nature inconstant, might venture on making an attack . . .

As soon as the death had taken place, Luis de Moscoso directed the body to be put secretly into a house, where it remained three days; and from there it was taken at night, by his order, to a gate of the town and buried within. The Indians, who had seen him ill, finding him no longer, suspected the reason; and passing by where he lay, they observed the ground loose, and, looking about, talked among themselves. This coming to the knowledge of Luis de Moscoso, he ordered the corpse to be taken up at night . . . it was taken out in a canoe and committed to the middle of the stream. . . .



Ch. 31. HOW THE GOVERNOR LUIS DE MOSCOSO LEFT GUACHOYA AND WENT TO CHAGUATE, AND FROM THERE TO AGUACAY. [May-July 1542]

. . . The Governor [Moscoso] ordered that the captains and principal personages should come together to consult and determine what they would do To every one it appeared well to march westwardly, because in that direction was New Spain [Mexico], the voyage by sea being [considered] more

hazardous and of doubtful accomplishment, as a vessel of sufficient strength to weather a storm could not be built, nor was there captain nor pilot, needle nor chart, nor was it known how distant might be the sea; neither had they any [knowledge] of it, or if the river did not take some great turn through the land, or might not have some fall over rocks where they might be lost. . . .

Ch. 32. HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM AGUACAY TO NAGUATEX, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. [March-July 1542]

. . . on Saturday, the twentieth of July, between that place and Naguatex, at midday, along a clump of luxuriant woods, the camp was seated. From there Indians being seen, who had come to spy them, those on horseback went in their pursuit, killed six and captured two. The prisoners being asked by the Governor why they had come, they said, to discover the numbers he had and their condition, having been sent by their lord, the Chief of Naguatex; and that he, with other caciques, who came in his company and his cause, had determined on giving him battle that day.

While thus conferring, many Indians advanced, formed in two squadrons, who, as soon as they saw that they were [noticed], giving whoops, they [attacked] the Christians with great fury, each on a different quarter; but finding how firm was the resistance, they turned, and fleeing, many lost their lives; . . .

Ch. 33. HOW THE CACIQUE OF NAGUATEX CAME TO VISIT THE GOVERNOR, AND HOW THE GOVERNOR WENT FROM THERE AND ARRIVED AT NONDACAO.

From Naguateg, where the Governor was, he sent a message to the Cacique, that should he come to serve and obey him, he would pardon the past; and if he did not, he would go to look [for] him and would inflict the [punishment] he deserved for what he had done. At the end of two days the Indian got back, bringing word that tomorrow the Cacique would come. . . . They arrived in the Governor's presence weeping . . . when the Chief, making his proper obeisance, thus spoke:

VERY HIGH AND POWERFUL LORD, WHOM ALL THE EARTH SHOULD SERVE AND OBEY: . . .

I believe that you and yours must be immortal; that you are master of the things of nature; since you [rule] them all and they obey you, even the very hearts of men. Witnessing the slaughter and destruction of my men in battle, which came of my ignorance, and the counsel of a brother of mine who fell in the action, from my heart did I repent the error that I committed, and directly I desired to serve and obey you: wherefore have I come, that you may [punish] and command me as your own.

The Governor replied, that the past would be forgiven and that, should he thenceforward do his duty, he would be his friend, . . .



Ch. 34. HOW THE GOVERNOR MARCHED FROM NONDACAO TO SOACATINO AND GUASCO, PASSING THROUGH A WILDERNESS, FROM WHERE [WITHOUT] A GUIDE AND INTERPRETER, HE [RETRACTED] TO NILCO. [July-October 1542]

. . . The day on which the Governor departed, the guide told him he had heard it said in Nondacao that the Indians of Soacatino had seen other Christians, at which we were all delighted, thinking it might be true and that they could have come by the way of New Spain; for if it were so, finding nothing in Florida of value,

we should be able to go out of it, there being fear we might perish in some wilderness. The Governor, having been led for two days out of the way, ordered that the Indian [guide] be put to the torture, when he confessed that his master, the Cacique of Nondacao, had ordered him to [lead] them in that manner, we being his enemies, and he, as his vassal, was bound to obey him. He was commanded to be cast to the dogs, and another Indian guided us to Soacatino, where we came the following day.

The country was very poor, and the [lack of corn] was greatly felt. The natives, being asked if they had any knowledge of other Christians, said they had heard that near there, towards the south, such men were moving about. For twenty days the march was through a very thinly peopled country where great privation and toil were endured. . . .

The Governor commanded the captains and principal personages to be called together that he might determine now by their opinions what was best to do. The majority declared it their judgment to return to the River Grande of Guachoya [Mississippi River] because in Anilco and thereabout was much maize; that during the winter they would build brigantines [large two-masted sailing ships], and the following spring go down the river in them in quest of the sea [Gulf of Mexico], where

having arrived, they would follow the coast to New Spain [Mexico] — an enterprise which, although it appeared to be one difficult to accomplish, yet from their experience it offered the only course to be pursued. . . .

Ch. 35. HOW THE CHRISTIANS RETURNED TO NILCO, AND FROM THERE WENT TO MINOYA, WHERE THEY PREPARED TO BUILD VESSELS IN WHICH TO LEAVE FLORIDA [i.e., present-day southern North America]. [To December 1542]

. . . They considered the voyage by sea to be very hazardous, because of their poor subsistence, and as perilous as was the journey by land, where they had looked to find a rich country before coming to the soil of the Christians . . . There was likewise much other discontent. Many grieved to go back and would rather have continued to run the peril of their lives than leave Florida poor. . . .

They set out from Anilco in the beginning of December, and on that march, as well as before coming there from Chilano, they [suffered] great exposure, for they passed through much water, and rain fell many times, bringing a north wind, with severe cold, so that when in the field they had the water both above and below them; and if at the end of a day's journey they found dry ground to lie upon, they [were] thankful. In these hardships nearly all the [captive] Indians died and also many Christians, after coming to Aminoya; the greater number being sick of severe and dangerous diseases. . . .

Ch. 36. HOW SEVEN BRIGANTINES WERE BUILT, AND THE CHRISTIANS TOOK THEIR DEPARTURE FROM AMINOYA. [December 1542-July 1543]

. . . In the month of June the brigantines [sailing ships] were finished, and the Indians having stated that the river rose but once in the year, which was with the melting of snow that had already passed, it being now summer and a long time since rain had fallen, God was pleased that the water should come up to the town where the vessels were, from where they floated into the river; . . . On the second day of July, of the year one thousand five hundred and forty-three, we took our departure from Aminoya.

Ch. 37. HOW THE CHRISTIANS ON THEIR VOYAGE WERE ATTACKED IN THE RIVER BY THE INDIANS OF QUIGUALTAM, AND WHAT HAPPENED.

. . . In seven brigantines went three hundred and twenty-two Spaniards from Aminoya. The vessels were of good build, except that the planks were thin, on account of the shortness of the spikes; and they were not pitched, nor had they decks to shed the water that might enter them, but planks were placed instead, upon which the mariners might run to fasten the sails, and the people accommodate themselves above and below. . . .

Ch. 38. HOW THE CHRISTIANS WERE PURSUED BY THE INDIANS.

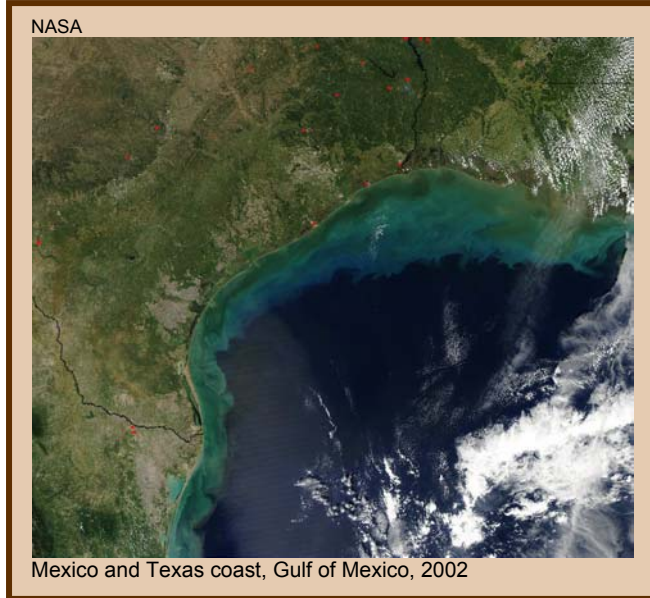
. . . From a small town near the bank, there came out seven canoes that pursued the Christians a short distance, shooting at them; but finding, as they were few, that little harm was done, they went back. From that time forth the voyage until near the end [had no mishap]; the Christians in seventeen days going down a distance of two hundred and fifty leagues [750 miles], a little more or less, by the river. When near the sea, it becomes divided into two arms, each of which may be a league and a half broad.

Ch. 39. HOW THE CHRISTIANS CAME TO THE SEA, WHAT OCCURRED THEN, AND WHAT HAPPENED ON THE VOYAGE. [July 1543]

. . . On the eighteenth day of July the vessels got under weigh, with fair weather and wind favorable for the voyage. . . . With a favorable wind they sailed all that day in fresh water, the next night, and the day following until vespers [evening prayers], at which they were greatly amazed, for they were very distant from the shore, and so great was the strength of the current of the river, the coast so shallow and gentle, that the fresh water entered far into the sea. . . .

Ch. 40. HOW THE BRIGANTINES LOST SIGHT OF EACH OTHER IN A STORM, AND AFTERWARDS CAME TOGETHER AT A CAY [small low island].

... in great fear of being lost, from midnight forward they suffered the intolerable torment of a myriad of mosquitos. The flesh is directly inflamed from their sting, as though it had received venom. Towards morning the wind lulled and the sea went down, but the insects continued none the less. The sails, which were white, appeared black with them at daylight; while the men could



not pull at the oars without assistance to drive away the insects. Fear having passed off with the danger of the storm, the people observing the swollen condition of each other's faces, and the marks of the blows they had given and received to rid them of the mosquitos, they could but laugh. The vessels came together in a creek, where lay the two brigantines that preceded them. . . .

Ch. 41. HOW THE CHRISTIANS ARRIVED AT THE RIVER PANICO [Mexico].

... they approached the shore without getting into the current, and went in the port, where no sooner had they come, than they saw Indians of both sexes in the apparel of Spain. Asking in what

country they were, they received the answer in their own language that it was the Rio de Panico, and that the town of the Christians was fifteen leagues inland. The pleasure that all received at this news cannot be sufficiently expressed: they felt as though a life had been newly given them. Many, leaping on shore, kissed the ground; and all, on bended knees with hands raised above them and their eyes to heaven, remained untiring in giving thanks to God. . . .

Ch. 42. HOW THE CHRISTIANS CAME TO PANICO, AND OF THEIR RECEPTION BY THE INHABITANTS. [September 1543]

From the time the Christians left the River Grande to come by sea from Florida to the River of Panico were fifty-two days. On the tenth day of September of the year 1543, they entered the Panico [River], . . . Of the persons who got back from Florida, there landed at that port three hundred and eleven Christians. . . . Don Antonio de Mendoza was greatly amazed at this news, as were all others of that city; for the people having entered far into Florida, they had been considered lost, nothing being heard from them in a long while; . . .

Ch. 43. THE FAVOR THE PEOPLE FOUND IN THE VICEROY AND RESIDENTS OF MEXICO.

... The news of their approach being known to the citizens, they went out on the highway to receive them and with great courtesy entreated for their companionship as favor, each one taking to his house as many as he dared, giving them for raiment all the best he could. . . . God reward them: and those whom He saw fit should escape, coming out of Florida to tread the soil of Christians, be He pleased that they live to serve Him; and to the dead, and to all those who believe in Him, and confess that in Him is their faith, grant, through His compassion, the glory of paradise.

Amen.