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IN REPLY REFER TO:

To: John Paige, Historian, DSC

From: Joseph Sanchez, Chief, PSC

Subject: Transcription and Translation of Hot Springs Passage in the Account
of the Hernando de Soto Expedition by the Gentleman from Elvas

The referenced transcription and translation from archaic Portuguese into English has particular significance to your study for one major reason. Previous translators have translated the word "alagoa" to mean lake, when in fact it could mean pool or marshlands. If the word lake is used then it would appear that Hot Springs, Arkansas could be precluded, for it is my understanding that pools and streams characterized the area when it was still in pristine condition. However, the word pool, at a place where a series of pools of different sizes characterized the area that the Gentleman from Elvas describes, allows for a broader interpretation of the location of the sixteenth century site in question. As I stated in my letter to Laura Soulliere Harrison, it is difficult to assess whether Hernando de Soto and his army were actually at the Hot Springs. The documents are vague regarding his whereabouts in the area. If there is no lake which fits what the Gentleman from Elvas references in Arkansas and if there are no other hot springs in the area, especially with saline deposits, and if the Indian Province of Cayas can be determined to be in the vicinity of Hot Springs, Arkansas, then there can be only one conclusion. For now, Soto's visit to Hot Springs should be tempered with qualifiers pointing to a "possibility" or a "probability" that Soto and his men were at the NPS site.

The Elvas account is found in Relacao Verdadeira dos Trabalhos que o Governador D. Fernando de Souto e certos Fidalgos Portugueses passaram no descobrimento da Provincia da Florida agora novamente escrita por um Fidalgo de Elvas. A copy of it may be found in microfilm at the University of New Mexico.

Transcription: Na provincia de Cayas o Governador um mes, no qual tempo os cavalos engordaram e medraram mais que em outras partes em mais tempo, a causa do muito mais e folha dele, que e o melhor penso se ha visto e bebiam de uma alagoa de agua muito quente e salobra e bebiam tanta que nas barrigas se enxergava quando os traziam da agua. Ate ali careciam os cristaos de sal e ali fizeram muito que para diante levaram.

Translation: The governor (Soto) spent a month in the province of Cayas, in that time our horses fattened and grew more (here) than in other places (where we spent) more time, because of the abundance of corn and corn husks there, which I think is the best that has been seen, and they (horses) drank from a large pool of very warm and brackish water, and they drank so much of the water that when they returned (from drinking) it was quite noticeable from their bellies (that they had drank so much). Up to that moment, the Christians had needed salt and there they made a lot of it to take henceforth with them.

Compare my translation with Edward Gaylord Bourne's 1904 version:

Sanchez--2.

"The Governor tarried a month in the Province 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. The beasts drank so copiously from the very warm and brackish lake, that they came having their bellies swollen with the leaf when they were brought back from watering. To that spot the Christians had wanted salt: they now made a quantity and took it with them."

Both translations should be compared with the transcription for fidelity. While I do prefer Bourne's word "throve," "grew" in my translation is more literal. Yet, if Elvas had meant lake he would have written lagoa not alagoa, for lagoa was in common usage in his day. Although alagoa could mean lake, it could also mean a natural pool, marshland or even swampland.

I am hopeful that this information is useful to you in your present study of Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Joseph Sanchez

Copies to:

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