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Chivalric Nomance

In the sixteenth century, numerous expeditions led by the Spanish occurred throughout the New World. Among these expeditions was Hernando de Soto's journey throughout the southeastern portion of North America. "The Account by a Gentleman from Elvas" and "The Account by Rodrigo Rangel" give massive amounts of information about the De Soto expedition. While these documents contain events that coincide, the separate accounts of the events stand apart in different ways. The major variance between the accounts is that Rangel is more critical of De Soto's greed and the immorality of the Conquistadores.

Rangel's version characterizes De Soto as a man motivated by avarice while the Elvas account simply makes observations about his behavior. After his army's stay in Cutifachiqui, De Soto decided to continue his journey elsewhere. The governor, as De Soto is often referred to in the documents, forced the cacique of the area to travel with him and his army. This method ensured that her Indians acted as porters for the expedition.[[1]](#footnote-1) When De Soto initially arrived at Cutifachiqui, the cacique treated him generously with lodging and gifts. The cacique even drew from herself a necklace made of pearls and placed it around the governor's neck.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, De Soto eventually took her captive. The Elvas and Rangel accounts provide different analyses of the situation.

The Elvas account simply states that De Soto did not give the cacique "good treatment as she deserved for the good will she had shown him and the welcome she had given him."[[3]](#footnote-3) The observation does not outright praise nor condemn the governor. This narrative provides slight judgment, as if De Soto deserved a firm slap on the hand. However, the Rangel account goes further with its analysis:

See how much more he wanted than what that queen or cacica of Cofitachequi, lady of Talimeco, offered him, where she told him that in that place of hers he would find so many pearls that all the horses of his army would not be able to carry them; and receiving him with such humanity, see how he treated her.[[4]](#footnote-4)

When portraying this event, Rangel emphasizes that De Soto only served his self-interest in that interaction. Rangel's comment on this situation is more disapproving than that of the gentleman from Elvas because he specifically talks about De Soto's greed.

There are more instances in Rangel's writing that highlight De Soto's greed. During the governor's sojourn in Tascaluca, he asked the cacique for tamemes and women.[[5]](#footnote-5) The account refers to the governor's request as an "unjust demand."[[6]](#footnote-6) Rangel also specifically refers to De Soto as a man who dispenses other people's lives for personal gain.[[7]](#footnote-7) De Soto's lack of consideration for other humans is exhibited. The Elvas account only offers a meager view on De Soto's behavior. However, Rangel's version demonstrates strong opposition to the values of the governor.

Rangel also deems some of the practices overall expedition as immoral, whereas the Elvas account continues lay out the facts without providing any critique. One example is the Spanish acquisition of tamemes. Tamemes were typically Indians that were offered to the conquistadores by caciques to be used as porters. When referencing tamemes, Rangel's account provides a view that is more extreme than that of the Elvas account. Rangel writes, "But as the cacique had already given him four hundred tamemes, or more accurately slaves…"[[8]](#footnote-8) It is obvious that Rangel is not content with the use of tamemes, but the gentleman from Elvas does not allude to any clear inclinations. He writes things like, "He gave him [the governor] the service of forty Indians."[[9]](#footnote-9) The gentleman from Elvas is either objective in his writings about the use of tamemes, or he assumes that the practice is universally accepted by his audience. This method was common among the conquistadores. Either way, there is a considerable distinction between the two documents' descriptions of tamemes.

The theme of immorality is also addressed by Rangel's opinion about some of the conquistadores. Both accounts address the casualties suffered by the Spanish. However, there is a slight, yet meaningful, difference between the two reports. When the gentleman from Elvas details the casualties suffered by the Spanish, he mentions honorable men who died during a battle. As for the rest of the casualties, the gentleman briefly gives them recognition as regular soldiers.[[10]](#footnote-10) Rangel mentions the honorable men, but he provides an assumption that encompasses all of the casualties since the start of the expedition. He adds, "From the time that this Governor and his armies entered in the land of Florida up to the time that they left from there, all the dead were one hundred and two Christians, and not all, to my way of thinking, in true penitence."[[11]](#footnote-11)

A few paragraphs later he concludes that "small is the hardship of this nobleman compared to those who die, if they do not win salvation."[[12]](#footnote-12) Rangel is convinced that some of the conquistadores were not on good terms with God before they perished. While gentleman from Elvas focuses solely on presenting the events, Rangel presents his feelings about the unvirtuous disposition of the conquistadores.

Both of these accounts consist of insightful information about the De Soto expedition. The account by Rangel seems to have a different purpose, however. His version criticizes the nature of De Soto and the dishonor that some conquistadores exhibit. The account by the gentleman of Elvas focuses more on the details. The distinction in Rangel's version is important because it sheds light on the conquistadors' activities. In a time when chivalric romance still has some influence, the account by Rangel is an interesting take on the expeditions in North America.

1. Gentleman of Elvas, "Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," in Lawrence Clayton, Vernon James Knight, Jr. and Edward C. Moore, eds., *The De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America (Tucsaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 85.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Elvas, "Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Elvas, "Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rodrigo Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," in Lawrence Clayton, Vernon James Knight, Jr. and Edward C. Moore, eds., *The De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America (Tucsaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 290.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Elvas, "Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Elvas, "Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rangel, "Account by Rodrigo Rangel," 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)