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## THE SEARCH FOR THE SEVEN CITIES AND EARLY AMERICAN EXPLORATION

by GEORGE E. BUKER

**W**HEN the Moors overran the Iberian peninsula at the opening of the eighth century, legend has it that the bishop of Oporto in Portugal led six other bishops and their followers westward across the Atlantic. He settled upon an island farther west than any sailor from Europe had ever been before, and he named it Antilla (which has had a variety of spellings). He allegedly burned his ships so that no one could return with news of his refuge. He assigned each bishop a portion of the island, and soon there were seven flourishing Christian communities established on Antilla. In the generations that followed, these people prospered in their remote hideaway cut off from Europe.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, sailors from western Europe began to venture out into the Atlantic. One of the inducements for their exploration was the riches of the Seven Cities of Antilla. In the sixteenth century, after Spanish exploration failed to find the Seven Cities on any of the Caribbean islands, some cartographers placed them on the mainland of North America. As the Spaniards moved into Mexico, stories of seven Indian cities to the north began to reach the conquistadores. The Indian province of Cibola replaced the island of Antilla as the believed locale of the cities and thus provided part of the impetus for the Spanish exploration of what is now the southeast and southwest portions of the United States. The Seven Cities legend has been associated with the exploits of Columbus, Cabot, Coronado, Hernando de Soto, and others, yet its historical presentation has been ancillary information to one or another of these expeditions.

Most medieval chroniclers state in their writings that a belief in islands and lands west of Europe goes back to the legend of the lost Atlantis found in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*, yet the Siete Ciudades is of medieval Iberian origin. A 1424 portolan chart

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is the oldest extant portrayal of Antilla. The island appears as an oblong land mass running almost north and south in the western Atlantic, extending from the latitude of Morocco, a little south of the Strait of Gibraltar, northward almost to the northern boundary of Portugal. It was one of four, islands arranged to form two groups, each with a larger and a smaller island. "Antyllia" had seven cities on it.<sup>1</sup>

G. R. Crone offers a plausible explanation for the portrayal of Antilla by noting an earlier map by Franciscus Pizigano in 1367 that contains, out in the Atlantic in an area west of Portugal, the map legend adjacent to a figure with one arm upraised. The caption reads: "Here are statues which stand before the shores of Atullia (ante ripas Atulliae) and which have been set up for the safety of sailors; for beyond is the vile sea, which sailors cannot navigate."<sup>2</sup> Within twenty years of Pizigano's map, others were made placing the island of Antilla in the area previously occupied by the legend. Unfortunately, the only knowledge of these maps is contained in Pedro de Medina's *Libra de grandezas de España* published in 1548. Medina notes that he found the island of Antilla drawn on an ancient marine chart and on a Ptolemy that had been sent to Pope Urban VI, who had died in 1389.<sup>5</sup> Thus for Crone it appears that the island could be traced to an unknown cartographer who first drew a border around the legend; possibly other cartographers left out the legend, thus creating the island of Antilla.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the basis for Antilla may have derived from reports of sailors. Between 1431 and 1460 there were actual discoveries, or rediscoveries, of the Canaries, Cape Verdes, and the Azores. On the map by Battista Beccario (1435), Antilla is one of a group of four islands collectively designated "Insulle a Novo Repte" (Newly Reported Islands). Martin Behaim's world globe of 1492 indicates that a ship from Spain drew near to Antilla and the Seven Cities in 1414. William Babcock, in *Legendary Islands of the Atlantic*, suggests that Antilla may be the geo-

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1. Armando Cortesao, "The North Atlantic Nautical Chart of 1424," *Imago Mundi* 10 (1953), 2, 4.
  2. G. R. Crone, "The Origin of the Name Antilla," *Geographical Journal* 41 (March 1938), 260.
  3. Pedro de Medina, *Obras de Pedro de Medina*, Angel Gonzalez Palencia, ed. (Madrid, 1944), 70; Cortesao, "The North Atlantic Nautical Chart," 8.
  4. Crone, "Origin of the Name Antilla," 261.

graphic representation of that voyage.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the 1414 event occurred prior to the chart of 1424.

E. G. R. Taylor provides an interesting hypothesis dealing specifically with Antilla and its companion island, Salvaga. According to Taylor, these islands represent information received by cartographers from ships' logs concerning one or more voyages from south to north along the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. Because the cartographers' information consisted of figures for two east-facing coastlines, the conventional drawing of four square islands was made. This was the same procedure used for the Canaries, Madeira, and the Azores when they were first reported. Taylor substantiates her hypothesis by redrawing Newfoundland and Labrador as they would have appeared to sailors coasting from south to north. Because the local compass varied two points (22% degrees), the two coasts lay in the magnetic meridian. This is the same relative position portrayed by the G. Benincasa 1470 map and the A. Canepo map of 1480. Taylor's results are tabulated as follows:

Section name	Modern map	1470	1480
Newfoundland (Antillia)	230 miles	240 miles	240 miles
Labrador (salvga)	180 miles	180 miles	190 miles
Total miles covered S to N <sup>6</sup>	560 miles	580 miles	580 miles

Taylor also explains how vessels could be forced to the Newfoundland and Labrador shores when the prevailing winds in the Atlantic at that latitude blow west and southwesterly. She points to the unusual weather conditions during the winter of 1962-1963 when, because of a strong high pressure area far to the north of the Azores, strong east winds persisted for weeks

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5. William H. Babcock, *Legendary Islands of the Atlantic: A Study in Medieval Geography*, American Geographical Society Research Series, no. 8 (New York, 1922), 70, 151-53.
  6. E. G. R. Taylor, "Imaginary Islands: A Problem Solved," *Geographical Journal* 130 (March 1964), 105-09.

about the latitude 50°N.<sup>7</sup> Her theory corroborates with Bartolomé de las Casas's account of a sailor who said that on a trip to Ireland the crew saw land they believed to be Tartaria. Although they did not sail towards it, the land stretched westward as far as they could see. Las Casas also stated that Pedro de Velasco told Columbus of a voyage on which he saw land to the west of Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

Most authorities studying medieval islands in the Atlantic treat the Lost Island, Antilla, and St. Brandon's Island as separate entities, but there is reason to believe that they were the same place. Honorius's *Imago Mundi* (ca. 1100) tells of the "lost" island that "though as a general rule unknown to man . . . was sometimes to be found by hazard, though never found when looked for. Hence it was called 'Perdita,' or 'Lost.'" Honorius also mentions that Saint Brandon visited that island.<sup>9</sup> The *Semeiança del mundo* (ca. 1223), the earliest extant geography of the world in the Spanish language, briefly discusses the Lost Island (Pardita en latin) that some had come upon accidentally but were unable to find when searching for it. This early text also states that Saint Brandon reached that island.<sup>10</sup> The English work, *Caxton's Mirrour of the World*, published in 1480 but based upon a Latin text of 1245, repeats the theme that some stumbled upon it but could never find it when looking for it and that "this yle fonde seynt Brandon the whiche, beyng therin on ferme londe, sawe & fonde many meruailles lyke as his legende conteyneth."<sup>11</sup> Pedro de Medina, in his *Libro de grandezas de España*, writes: "Not very far from this island of Madera is another island which is called Antilla, which is no longer seen. . . . This island Antilla, in other times was found by the Portuguese, but now when it is searched for, it is not found. . . . It is said that sailing at a distance one sees this island and on approaching near it one can not find it."<sup>12</sup>

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7. Ibid., 106, 108.

8. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 113 vols., Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España (Madrid, 1875), LXII, 100-01.

9. John K. Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades*, American Geographical Society Research Series, no. 15 (New York, 1925), 351.

10. William E. Bull and Harry F. Williams, *Semeiança del mundo: A Medieval Description of the World* (Berkeley, 1959), 96.

11. Oliver H. Prior, ed., *Caxton's Mirrour of the World* (London, 1913), 94-96.

12. Medina, *Obras de Pedro de Medina*, 70.

Medina states that his information came from a fourteenth-century map. According to him, Antilla and the Lost Island were one.

Columbus's son, in his history, wrote of the Lost Island, saying that "some Portuguese have written, that the pilots of their nation who have reached this island, have never been able to return to it, and that nevertheless, in the time of the Infanta Don Enrique some sailors were blown to this island." He further relates that when they returned to Portugal they were not willing to lead an expedition back to the island; therefore, they had to flee the kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

The usual answer given by modern historians for the phenomenon of the Lost Island is that sailors probably saw low-lying clouds on the horizon that appeared to be an island. In sailing towards the island, it disappeared. This theory, however, does not grant much ability to medieval seamen. It is unlikely that they were confused by clouds on the horizon. A more plausible explanation notes the effect of hot, dust-laden sirocco winds that occasionally blow off the Libyan deserts and across the Mediterranean Sea. Sirocco winds cause several atmospheric disturbances, including radio interference, radar ducting (the bending of normal line-of-sight radar waves over the horizon), and the creation of mirages at sea. It is possible that sirocco-like conditions appeared in the Atlantic causing sailors to see land on the horizon that was in fact many miles beyond the visual horizon. Under these conditions, seamen could have seen islands that disappeared as they sailed toward them.

According to the legend, the Seven Cities were founded in the early years of the eighth century. Yet the earliest mention of them occurred when Pedro de Medina reported finding them on a map and a Ptolemy (ca. 1380); neither source is presently extant. Medina writes: "There are on [Antilla] people who speak the language of Spain, that of the king don Rodrigo last of the Gothic kings of Spain, when the barbarians entered Spain, it is believed that to this island he fled. This island has an Archbishop and six bishops, where each one has his own city, because of so many it was called the island of Seven Cities."<sup>14</sup>

13. Fernando Colón, *Historia del almirante don Cristóbal Colón en la cual se da particular y verdadera relación de su vida y sus hechos, y del descubrimiento de las Indias occidentales, llamadas nuevo-mundo*, 22 vols., Colección de libros raros ó curiosos que tratan de América (Madrid, 1892), V, 45.

14. Medina, *Obras de Pedro de Medina*, 70.

The earliest extant recorded reference to the Seven Cities per se is the charter granted by King Alfonso V of Portugal to Fernao Teles in 1475.<sup>15</sup> Martin Behaim's 1492 globe is the earliest record of the actual legend of the Seven Cities still in existence. He relates that "in the year 734 of Christ, when the whole of Spain had been won by the heathen [Moors] of Africa, the above island Antilia, called Septe citade [Seven Cities], was inhabited by an archbishop from Porto in Portugal, with six other bishops, and other Christians, men and women, who had fled thither from Spain, by ship, together with their cattle, belongings, and goods. [In] 1414 a ship from Spain got nighest it without being endangered."<sup>16</sup> From the preceding discussion of the origins of Antilla and the Seven Cities it is apparent that the island was an amalgamation of earlier legends, possible copying errors, and actual voyages.

As for the impact of the Seven Cities of Antilla upon explorations in the Atlantic, Las Casas recorded that Diego Detiene left Portugal looking for Antilla forty years before Columbus discovered the Indies.<sup>17</sup> There are also records of patents granted by the Portuguese kings during the fifteenth century to seek out the Seven Cities. In 1462, Guomcallo Fernandez petitioned King Alfonso V of Portugal for permission to search for an island he had sighted earlier but had not explored because of adverse weather. On January 28, 1474, the king granted Fernao Telles the right to investigate new islands and to settle such places as he desired, provided they were not in the region of Guinea.<sup>18</sup>

Prior to June 1474, a churchman from Lisbon, visiting Italy, met Paolo Toscanelli of Florence. Toscanelli had a theory that contact with Asia could be established by a westward voyage into the Atlantic. When the Portuguese traveler brought this view back to the court of Alfonso V, the king requested more information. Toscanelli sent a map and a letter explaining that Quinsay in China was at the same latitude as Lisbon and about 5,000 sea miles away. By deviating from a direct route, it would be possible to refresh a ship and crew at Antilla, 1,500 miles from

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15. J. A. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery Under Henry VII* (Cambridge, England, 1962), 184-86.
  16. E. G. Ravenstein, *Martin Behaim, His Life and His Globe* (London, 1908), 77.
  17. Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 100.
  18. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages*, 183-84; Samuel E. Morison, *Portuguese Voyages to America in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1940), 32.

Europe, and again at Cipango (Japan), about 3,500 miles away.<sup>19</sup> Evidently the Portuguese were not interested in sailing such distances across open seas, for they did not organize any expeditions to reach Asia via the West. The Portuguese continued their efforts to coast around Africa.

If unwilling to make the long voyage to Asia by a westward journey, the Portuguese were at least willing to search for Antilla. The Toscanelli letter, however, raised questions about the right of conquest over an island peopled by Christians. On November 10, 1475, Alfonso V amplified his earlier charter saying that if the Seven Cities should be found, Telles was granted the right of "lordship and jurisdiction and power over the inhabitants."<sup>20</sup>

The Portuguese were not alone in exploring the Atlantic. English sailors from Bristol also sailed into the western sea. The voyages of the Bristolmen during the reign of Edward IV are not well documented; however, there are records indicating that in the early 1480s Bristol merchants outfitted vessels to search for the island of Brasil. Ship's master Thloyde set sail on July 15, 1480, and again the following year. On January 20, 1483, Thomas Croft of Bristol sought the same destination. The first document to demonstrate that Bristolmen sought the Seven Cities was the 1498 report of the Spanish representative in London, Pedro de Ayala. He reported that "for the last seven years the people of Bristol have equipped two, three, [and] four caravels to go in search of the Island of Brasil and the Seven Cities according to the fancy of this Genoese [John Cabot]."<sup>21</sup>

The Treaty of Alcaçovas (1479) gave the Canaries to Spain and Madeira to Portugal. When the aborigines of the Canaries resisted Spanish authority, Englishmen served the Spanish crown in the conquest of the Canaries and received land grants for their efforts. Thus, there was intercourse between the English and Spanish seafarers during this period. Las Casas wrote of the Seven Cities "whose fame and wealth has even reached to us, causing many to [attempt to] become conquerors of the country, and to spend enormous amounts of money without any practical purpose."<sup>22</sup> It appears that expeditions from Portugal, Bristol, and Spain only sought riches, trade, and conquest. The charters

19. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages*, 7-8.

20. *Ibid.*, 184-86.

21. *Ibid.*, 23.

22. Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 99.

and patents of these adventures show little concern with opening a route to Asia, and their goal was limited to finding the Seven Cities of Antilla.

In contrast to those goals, Columbus concerned himself with finding a route to Asia. While in Portugal, he heard about Toscanelli. Columbus wrote to him and asked for a copy of the letter and map that Toscanelli had earlier sent to the court in Lisbon. According to Columbus's son, Toscanelli answered his request. None of the original documents have survived, but the son possessed copies that he included in his history.<sup>23</sup> In his letter, Toscanelli refers to the globe as the best method of demonstrating his hypothesis as to the small distance separating Europe from Asia on a westward route.

Columbus must have used the existence of Antilla and Cipango to reassure his crew before their first voyage. On the eighteenth day out of the Canaries, the captain of the *Pinta* talked with Columbus about "certain islands" that should be in the vicinity, according to the chart Columbus had sent over three days before. Columbus agreed and offered the explanation that currents must have carried them northwestward. This would explain why they did not sight the islands. Later, when Columbus arrived in the Bahamas, his information led him to believe that he was in the longitude of Cipango. The Indians told him of a large island (Cuba) where merchants traded gold and spices using great ships. Columbus, of course, obtained this information by means of signs since he did not know the language. Yet he wrote that Cuba must be "the island of Cipango, of which marvellous things are recounted and in the spheres which I have seen and in the drawings of mappemondes, it is in this region."<sup>24</sup> He was not aware of a new world between Europe and Asia.

John Cabot was another explorer determined to use the Seven Cities as a way station en route to Asia. He concluded that the islands found by the Spanish were in the mid Atlantic and that Columbus had not yet reached Asia. By sailing westward in the northern latitudes, he hoped to find Antilla, refresh his crew, and continue westward to Cipango, which he thought was west of the Spanish Indies. The final leg of the journey would carry

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23. Colón, *Historia*, 38-39.

24. Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, Cecil Jane, trans. (New York, 1960), 14-15, 42-43.

Cabot to the Asian mainland. (The world map by G. M. Contarini, 1506, is an excellent graphic presentation of Cabot's view.) When Cabot returned to England after his first voyage in 1497, he evidently thought that he had discovered the Seven Cities. On August 24, 1497, Raimondo de Soncino sent a dispatch to the Duke of Milan stating that Cabot had found two new islands "and also discovered the Seven Cities, 400 leagues from the island of England, on the western passage." He also wrote that the king intended to send out fifteen or twenty ships the next year.<sup>25</sup>

When early explorers failed to find the Seven Cities on the islands of the Indies, the cities became disassociated from newly discovered Spanish islands. The La Cosa map of 1500 includes the caption "mar descubierta por inglese" (sea discoveries by the English) just off the northeastern portion of the mainland. The coastline runs almost east and west, and on the eastern portion are place names. The map has deteriorated in the past 130 years, and the rendering of place names by earlier investigators is probably more accurate than later readings. Written over the land discovered by the English "there was formerly visible a fragment of inscription naming the Seven Cities, apparently in Spanish, and an inconclusive vestige of it is still detectable."<sup>26</sup> In addition, there is a manuscript world map (ca. 1508) that is similar. It has Septem ciuitates written on the northern land mass, and there are seven miters drawn along the coast.<sup>27</sup>

The Cantino map of 1502 represents the Portuguese view. It situates the demarcation line between Castille and Portugal, 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, and misplaces the Portuguese discoveries near Newfoundland well to the east of the demarcation line. The islands about Hispaniola are titled "Has antilhas del ray de castilla" (the Antilles of the king of Castille). Beyond the Antilles a section of coastline is marked "Parte de Assia" (part of Asia).<sup>28</sup> The La Cosa, Cantino, and the manuscript world map all convey the separation of the Seven Cities from the island of Antilla.

25. H. P. Bigger, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497-1534*, publications of the Canadian Archives, no. 5 (Ottawa, 1911), 15-16.

26. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages*, 77.

27. For a reproduction of the map see R. A. Skelton, *Explorers' Maps: Chapters in the Cartographic Record of Geographical Discovery* (London, 1958; revised, New York, 1970), 63, 72.

28. *Ibid.*, 58, 71-72.

This changed view of Antilla and the Seven Cities reached Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean. About 1513 the Turkish Admiral Piri Re'is created a world map drawing upon Spanish and Portuguese discoveries. In addition to his map, Re'is wrote *Kitabi Bahriye (On Seas)* in which he stated that Columbus had discovered the Antilles and that "his map has reached down to us." He also mentioned that in one of the Turkish sea battles with the Spanish, about 1501, a seaman was captured who had made three voyages with "Colon-bo" to America.<sup>29</sup> Re'is's map does not portray the Seven Cities; however, there is a north-south oriented island similar in shape to the Antilla of earlier maps located east of the curved archipelago of the Lesser Antilles. The inscription states: "And this island is called Antilia Island. There are a great many living creatures and parrots and logwood, but [the island] is not inhabited."<sup>30</sup>

The discovery of a more advanced civilization on the Yucatan peninsula called forth a new discussion by the Spanish on the possible existence of the Seven Cities. During this period it appears to have been an academic endeavor to explain how the Indians of the Yucatan achieved an advanced culture. Thus, the chroniclers mention many theories to explain this new Indian society in terms of a European or Mediterranean background. Bernal Díaz del Castillo thought that the Indian figures and idols were antiques from an earlier Jewish colony, probably a remnant from Jerusalem after its destruction by Titus and Vespasian.<sup>31</sup> The chaplain of the second Spanish expedition to the Yucatan wrote that the practice of circumcision among the Indians indicated that Moors and Jews might be nearby. The Indians told him that "people were near who used ships, clothes and arms like the Spaniards, and that a canoe could go where they are in ten days, a voyage perhaps of 300 miles."<sup>32</sup>

Finding the symbol of the cross among the Indians of the Yucatan led many Spaniards to wonder if the region was indeed the Seven Cities founded by the Christian bishops in the eighth century. Both Gómara and Oviedo mentioned this in their his-

29. Inan Afet, *Bir Türk Amiralî* (Istanbul, 1937), 344.

30. Paul Kahle, "A Lost Map of Columbus," *Geographical Review* 23 (October 1933), 635.

31. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Maurice Keatinge, trans. (New York, 1938), 37.

32. Henry R. Wagner, ed. and trans., *The Discovery of New Spain in 1518 by Juan de Grijalva* (Berkeley, CA, 1942), 83.

tories, although neither supported the connection.<sup>33</sup> It is a valid assumption that the quest for the Seven Cities played a slight, if any, role in prompting a third expedition led by Hernán Cortés in 1519. In the case of the Yucatan, the Spaniards made their discovery and found wealth before rumors of the Seven Cities became a popular topic for speculation. In fact, the discovery occurred during a time when the legend was in disfavor because of previous failures to find the Seven Cities in the Caribbean.

It was not until the Nuño de Guzmán expedition in Mexico in 1530 that the Seven Cities again provided an impetus for further explorations. Guzmán sought the seven large towns that his Indian slave Tejo claimed to have visited as a boy. Tejo's father had taken him along on a journey to these cities to trade feathers for ornaments of gold and silver. The towns were so large that certain streets were devoted entirely to silver workers.<sup>34</sup> Guzmán ended his search abruptly when Cortés returned to Mexico. The rivalry between the two men put the expedition on hold. The arrival of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca a few years later supplied the necessary stimulant to seek the Seven Cities once again.

Late in April 1536, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca led four companions, three Spaniards, and a black slave named Estevan from the wilderness to a frontier settlement in Mexico. They were the only survivors of an expedition that had set out from Cuba in 1528 to explore Florida. The group had met with one disaster after another. After failing to meet their ships at a rendezvous point on Florida's west coast, they killed their horses to make horsehide boats hoping to sail along the coast to Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca and some of the others survived shipwrecks off the coast of Texas and became slaves to the Indians. Later, Cabeza de Vaca became renowned as a medicine man and walked across the continent with a large following of Indians, emerging on the west coast of Mexico at Culiacán. From his own writings, Cabeza de Vaca appeared to have purposely created an enigma

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33. Francisco Lopez de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1941), I, 113-16, 118-19; Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés Gonzalez, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra firme del mar océano*, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1851-1855), I, 497.

34. George Parker Winship, "The Coronado Expedition, 1540-1542," *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1892-93* (Washington, 1896), 473.

concerning his wanderings. While he wrote of the poverty of the Indians he met and of the bleakness of the land through which he traveled, he continually implied that there was more that he was not telling.

When Cabeza de Vaca visited Mexico City, he told Antonio de Mendoza, the viceroy, stories about the wealth of Indian villages with four- and five-story buildings. Mendoza tried to induce him to lead an expedition into the interior, but Cabeza de Vaca preferred to return to Spain. He arrived at the court in Spain in 1538, shortly after Hernando de Soto obtained concessions to Florida. The Gentleman of Elvas, an anonymous hidalgo who accompanied the Soto expedition, wrote that Cabeza de Vaca spoke of poverty in the Indian country and of the hardships he had endured, but he hinted of much more. "Here I have seen this; and the rest which I saw I leave to confer of with His Majesty."<sup>35</sup> From his stories, Cabeza de Vaca implied that the rich Indian cities were north of his route, and he had gleaned his information from Indians he had met in his wanderings.

Hernando de Soto was anxious to have Cabeza de Vaca accompany him to Florida. For a time Cabeza de Vaca planned to go, but a rift developed between the two men, and he withdrew from the expedition. Cabeza de Vaca continued to imply that the venture was desirable. He said, however, that he did not want to serve under another and that he would seek a different post from the crown rather than go with Soto to Florida. He told his own kinsmen that though he could not reveal all to them, "he would advise them to sell their estates and go-that in so doing they would act wisely."<sup>36</sup>

Cabeza de Vaca succeeded well. Both Soto and Mendoza prepared expeditions to explore the interior. In addition, Pedro de Alvarado, who had returned to Spain in 1536, must have met Cabeza de Vaca at court. At about this time, Alvarado changed his plans for voyaging into the South Seas and petitioned the crown for permission to build a fleet and explore the Pacific toward the west or the north. Alvarado's request was granted,

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35. The Gentleman of Elvas, "The Narrative of the Expedition of Hernando de Soto by the Gentleman of Elvas," *Spanish Explorers in the Southern United States 1528-1543*, Theodore H. Lewis, ed. (New York, 1907), 136.

36. *Ibid.*, 137.

and he returned to America at the beginning of 1539 with the necessary equipment to outfit a large fleet.<sup>37</sup>

A race developed between Mendoza in Mexico and Soto in Spain to see who could reach the Seven Cities first. The viceroy in Mexico ordered Fray Marcos de Niza to explore the interior, north of Culiacán, using Estevan as his guide. Thus, in the early months of 1539, Fray Marcos sent Estevan into the northern wilderness ahead of the main body. He was instructed to send back reports of his progress and to send a cross, the size of which would indicate his success. Four days after he left, Estevan returned a cross as large as a man. He also dispatched an Indian who had been to the Seven Cities. Fray Marcos reported that the Indian told him so many wonderful things about the Seven Cities that he would not believe it until he had visited the place for himself. The messenger also reported that Estevan was thirty days from the first of the towns, the one called Cibola. This was the first mention of the Indian name for one of the cities, and thereafter the search continued for the "Seven Cities of Cibola."

Estevan, contrary to Fray Marcos's instructions, hurried on, hoping for a reward if he alone found the Seven Cities. At the first city, Indians captured him and held him for questioning for three days. Estevan told of two white men who were behind him who were to teach the natives of the "God in the sky." The Indians thought "he was a spy because he was black and said the people were white in the country he came from. They killed him and let his Indians go. They fled and met the friars sixty leagues distant from the city."<sup>38</sup>

When news of Estevan's death reached Fray Marcos, he determined to push on and at least see the city. He persuaded two of the principal men from Estevan's party to accompany him, and with his own Indians and interpreters continued on. Finally, he sighted the city in the distance. "The houses are, as the Indians had told me, all of stone, with their stories and flat roofs. As far as I could see from a height where I placed myself to observe, the settlement is larger than the city of Mexico." After taking possession of all the land for the king of Spain, the friar turned

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37. Winship, "The Coronado Expedition," 352.

38. *Ibid.*, 475; Adolph F. Bandelier, *Hemenway Southwestern Archaeological Expedition*, Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America, American Series V (Cambridge, MA, 1890), 129-31, 161.

back “with much more fright than food.”<sup>39</sup> When the friars returned, they told Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, the acting governor, of the discoveries of Estevan and Fray Marcos. Coronado took them to Mexico City so the viceroy might hear about the Seven Cities of Cibola. In a short time, 300 Spaniards and 800 natives were collected for the proposed conquest.

Fray Marcos’s first exploration occurred at the same time that Soto, now in Havana, prepared for his landing in Florida. Later, Soto brought his nine vessels into Tampa Bay and anchored there because of the shoal waters. On May 30, 1539, he landed his force, including 213 horses, so that he might lighten his ships and bring them closer to the land. This was the beginning of a trek that would last four years and cover more than 350,000 square miles of the southeastern part of the present-day United States. Soto and his party spent their first winter in Florida at Apalache (present-day Tallahassee). Then began his inland travels. Soto followed the basic route of Cabeza de Vaca but traveled much farther inland. It was as though he was seeking the riches that Cabeza de Vaca believed could be found to the north of his own wanderings.

Almost a year after Soto arrived in Florida, February 23, 1540, Coronado led his army out to conquer the Seven Cities of Cibola with high hopes; after all, Fray Marcos had seen Cibola, and he was accompanying them! The trek was difficult, but the men were buoyant with prospects of conquest. At last, on July 7, they arrived at Cibola and found not a European-like city with great wealth, but a poor Zuñi Indian pueblo. Pedro de Castañeda, who accompanied Coronado, reported that “such were the curses that some hurled at Friar Marcos that I pray God may protect him from them.”<sup>40</sup> Coronado’s report to the viceroy ended the legend of the Seven Cities when he said: “The Seven Cities are seven little villages. . . . They are all within a radius of 5 leagues.”<sup>41</sup> As myth and reality met, the dreams of wealth crumbled. From the first, the Seven Cities had been a frontier legend just beyond the next island, over the next mountain, across the next river, always on the uncharted areas of the map. Now they had been found.

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39. Bandelier, *Hemenway Southwestern Archaeological Expedition*, 161.

40. Winship, “The Coronado Expedition,” 483.

41. *Ibid.*