Clarence A. Clayton, Vernon James Knight, Jr. and Edward C. Moore, eds. The De Soto Chronicles: Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America in 1539-1543.

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In short these two volumes provide, in translation, virtually every text of relevance to the de Soto Expedition. Since this was the first contact Europeans made with the Native Americans of the Southeast United States, this is one of the basic research tools for anyone doing research in the areas of Spanish culture, pre-conquest Native American cultures, the history of Southeastern states or Southeastern Archaeology. It is obviously desirable to have all these sources together in one text. In addition, an effort has been made to provide literal translations and complete texts in so far as is possible, so that these volumes provide not only a single source, but also a much more reliable source for these texts than has, in many cases, been available until now.

To the extent that I can judge (late Renaissance Spanish and Portuguese being areas of study in their own right) the translations seem excellent and, particularly in the case of de la Vega’s work which is much more literary than the other texts, even quite readable. While this isn’t exactly bedtime reading, I nevertheless
often find myself reading more than I need for the current research I am doing because I get interested. The scholarly support (footnotes, index, bibliography) are well done and useful. This is altogether a major scholarly effort and belongs on the bookshelf on anyone who works in these areas, in spite of the rather high cost.

The only objection I find to the books is with the maps, which are too small, poorly reproduced and hard to use. I am accustomed to the excellent maps that are the norm in Biblical Archaeology, so perhaps I am overly critical, but better maps would be a definite help to me. On the other hand, the various illustrations, while pleasant, don't really add to the scholarly value of the text. I would personally much prefer better maps and no pictures.

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