



“Escudo de armas de Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain”.

1. Project

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and His Governorship of the Río de la Plata (1540-1545). This project will continue and finish an ongoing collaborative research project that began between Pablo Pastrana-Pérez (SPAN), and the late Catherine Julien (HIST). The project involves the paleographic transcription, edition and translation of a selected list of documents pertaining to Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s expedition and governorship of the Río de la Plata region in South America, which has been largely ignored or marred with controversy. This project seeks to set the record straight about Cabeza de Vaca’s governorship. Thirteen of the thirty four documents in the edition await an authoritative Spanish edition, English translation, and editorial notes. The introduction and the four essays to accompany the edition have yet to be written. A final visit to the General Archive of the Indies, in Seville, Spain, is also needed. The result will be a three-volume publication under contract with the University of Nebraska Press.

2. Background to the Project

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca is one of the best known Spanish explorers of the sixteenth century. He is also regarded as one of the most important writers about the early Spanish conquest of the Americas. He was one of four survivors on an epic expedition across the southern part of the United States, from the Gulf Coast of Florida to Mexico City (1527-35). On the basis of this trip, he wrote a report that has come to be known as *Naufragios*, or *Castaways*, the most-published account of travel in the Americas because of its vivid account of survival against all odds. This narrative account is the first of any part of what is now the United States and has been repeatedly published in English and Spanish in the past century and is frequently assigned reading in university classes in history and literature. After his north-American “odyssey”, Cabeza de Vaca returned to Spain, but was too late to be awarded the governorship of Florida. Not having had enough, he went back to the Americas, this time as governor of the Río de la Plata Province, between 1540 and 1545. Because he had been unable to keep written records of his North American expedition, he compensated for it on his return to America the second time, when he meticulously documented every move of his journey up the Paraguay River, through the Pantanal, a large wetland region, to Asunción, in modern-day Paraguay. Thanks to the extent to which Cabeza de Vaca commissioned the documentation of every move and every conflict, what has survived from his second expedition may be the largest and richest corpus of material produced by any exploration party during more than a century of European exploration in this hemisphere.