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Edited by Luis L. Dominguez

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The Conquest of the River Plate (1535-1555)

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The Conquest of the River Plate (1535-1555)

*Translated for the Hakluyt Society with Notes
and an Introduction*

EDITED BY LUIS L. DOMINGUEZ



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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108013505

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2010

This edition first published 1891
This digitally printed version 2010

ISBN 978-1-108-01350-5 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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THE CONQUEST

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THE CONQUEST
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(1535-1555).

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VOYAGE OF ULRICH SCHMIDT TO THE RIVERS LA
PLATA AND PARAGUAI.

FROM THE ORIGINAL GERMAN EDITION, 1567.

II.
THE COMMENTARIES OF ALVAR NUÑEZ CABEZA
DE VACA.

FROM THE ORIGINAL SPANISH EDITION, 1555.

TRANSLATED FOR THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY.

With Notes and an Introduction,

BY

LUIS L. DOMINGUEZ,

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ACADEMY OF HISTORY.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY,
4, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

M.DCCC.XCI.

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CORRIGENDA.

- Page 1, title, *for* Von Straubingen, *read* of Straubing.
„ 15, line 27, *for* lakes ix, *read* lake six.
„ 16, last line, *for* salnaischo, *read* saluaischo.
„ 24, note, *for* for mof, *read* form of.
„ 32, line 15, *for* St. Catherine, *read* Sta. Catharina.
„ 43, note, *for* Guaragos, *read* Guarayos.
„ 80, line 4, *for* Schmiedel, *read* Schmidt.
„ 83, note, *for* Uruguai, *read* Uruguay.
„ 106, line 18, *for* Estropiñan, *read* Estopiñan.
„ 107, line 4, *for* Estropiñan, *read* Estopiñan.

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INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE the pleasure to present to the Hakluyt Society, in the accompanying volume, the first two historians who wrote on the conquest of the Rio de la Plata, which took place in the reign of Charles V, King of Spain and Emperor of Germany.

The first of these was a German, a native of Straubing, in Bavaria, whose name was Ulrich Schmidt. The second was a Spaniard, native of Jerez de la Frontera in Andalusia, named Alvar Nuñez, better known by the surname which he took from his mother, Doña Teresa Cabeza de Vaca. This Alvar Nuñez was a grandson of Don Pedro Vera, who, in the time of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholics, undertook to conquer the Canary Islands at his own cost. As his means, however, were insufficient for so great an enterprise, he borrowed money of a Moorish banker upon pledge. The security given by this inhuman father consisted of his two sons, the younger of whom was the father of Alvar Nuñez; and this transaction, characteristic of a soldier in those semi-barbarous times, seemed to presage the singular adventures in which the son of the latter was destined to take part.

Of the German's lineage nothing is known. I believe him to have been an obscure individual,

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servant or agent, like the modern *commis voyageurs* or commercial travellers, for one of the wealthy houses of commerce established at Seville in the time of the Emperor, and concerning which I shall have something to say by-and-by.

Both the German adventurer as well as the Andalusian cavalier gave their names to the narratives of what happened to them in America, in the two books published together in the present volume.

Twelve years after the discovery of the river Plate in 1516, by Juan Diaz de Solis, two Spanish expeditions explored its shores. One of these had been sent out by the Emperor to India, under the orders of Sebastian Cabot, and the other, under the command of the pilot Diego Garcia, to take possession of that river. Cabot altered his course and went up the Paraná till he arrived at the Rio Paraguai in 1527, and Garcia made the same voyage the following year. Both these navigators shortly afterwards returned to Spain, having only left a small colony at Sancti Spiritus, in the neighbourhood of the present city of Rosario, which was soon transferred to Iguape, on the Atlantic coast, very near the limit fixed, by the treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, between the possessions of Spain and Portugal.

When Cabot returned to Spain in 1530, and told of the pieces of silver he had seen among the Indians of the Chaco, the King of Portugal sent Martin Affonso de Souza to establish himself in the extreme south of his possessions in Brazil; and this

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Portuguese captain, after examining the coast of the ocean as far as the entrance of the Rio de la Plata, founded at the close of the year 1531, in the island of San Vicente, the first regular colony on that coast where now stands the little city of Santos.

The vicinity of these two rival colonies—the much smaller Spanish one of Iguape, and the stronger Portuguese one in San Vicente—endangered the peaceful and tranquil possession of those lands; and for this reason the Spanish Government resolved on sending immediately a formal expedition which should permanently occupy the north of the territory belonging to it, according to the above-mentioned treaty, on that coast. This expedition was placed under the orders of the first Adelantado and Captain-General of the province of Rio de la Plata, Don Pedro de Mendoza.

With him sailed a ship belonging to some Flemish merchants established in Seville, and in this vessel went their servant, or agent, one Ulrich Schmidt, a native of Bavaria, whom the Spaniards called Schmidel, a name which was Latinized, according to the custom of that time, into Uldericus Faber.

This Bavarian remained in the province of the Rio de la Plata some twenty years, taking an active, though obscure, part in the events of the Spanish conquest of that part of America. In December 1552, he returned to his native country, visiting Seville in September of the following year, and Antwerp in January 1554. Thirteen years after-

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wards there appeared in Germany, in a collection of voyages published at Frankfort-on-Maine by Sebastian Franck, a narrative of Schmidt's voyage under the following title :

“ Warhafftige und liebliche Beschreibung etlicher fürnemen Indianischen Landschafften und Insulen, die vormals in keiner Chronicken gedacht, und erstlich in der schiffart Ulrici Schmidts von Straubingen, mit grosser gefahr erkündigt, und von ihm selber auff's fleissigst beschrieben und dargethan.”

This is the book translated into English, for the first time, from the original German, and now published by the Hakluyt Society. It is unnecessary for me to say that the translation is not my work.

The historical period embraced by the voyage of Schmidt extends from 1535 to 1552, and refers to the governorship of Don Pedro de Mendoza, of his successor, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, and to the principal part taken in the events of that period by Captain Domingo Martinez de Irala, under whose orders the author of the narrative continually served. Irala, actuated by personal ambition, defeated the plans of Mendoza, deserted Buenos Ayres, abandoned his second in command in the Chaco, occasioning his death and that of all those who had accompanied him across that great desert to the confines of Peru, and, when the second Adelantado, Alvar Nuñez, arrived, opposed him by intrigues and conspiracy till he contrived to depose and send him in chains to Spain, under the insidious and calumnious accusation of having committed all sorts of crimes.

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Alvar Nuñez, after waiting judgment for eight years, was acquitted, and recompensed by the king, and to justify himself before the world he published a narrative of the events that had happened to him during his term of office, viz., from 1541 to 1544.

This record, the first published on the conquest of the Rio de la Plata and Paraguai, appeared in Valladolid in 1555, under the general title “*Relacion y Comentarios de Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, de lo acaecido en las dos jornadas que hizo à las Indias*.” The *Relacion* refers to his adventures in Florida, and was first published in 1542,¹ while the *Comentarios* appeared as a second part of the new edition of his voyages under the title just mentioned. This is the second book contained in the present volume.

The *Voyage* of Ulrich Schmidt, and the *Commentaries* of Alvar Nuñez, are, as it were, the flint and steel which, when struck together, produce light.

The work of Schmidt, which in nearly all its details is in manifest contradiction to that of Alvar Nuñez, was published twelve years after the *Commentaries*, and was apparently written expressly to refute them, taking up the defence of Domingo de Irala, who is the principal figure of the picture, and whose seditious and immoral conduct had been denounced by Alvar Nuñez. The Hakluyt Society, in bringing together these two contemporary records of the Spanish conquest, leaves the reader to pass his own judgment on the issues raised.

¹ This part has been translated into English by Buckingham Smith, and published in Washington in 1851.

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INTRODUCTION.

This Society had published in 1874 another narrative, similar to that of Ulrich Schmidt, relating to the same historical period, the voyage of Hans Stade, also a German adventurer, who visited the southern coast of Brazil shortly after the sedition against Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca in Paraguai. Though edited with notes and explanations by the gallant Captain, afterwards Sir Richard Burton,¹ these have not thrown the necessary light to show the motive of Stade's voyage, nor other circumstances essential to form a clear and precise idea how this other German adventurer is entitled to a place in the history of the Province of the Rio de la Plata as well as in that of the conquest of Brazil.

When Alvar Nuñez returned a prisoner to Spain, the king appointed another Adelantado to replace him and continue the Spanish colonisation from which he had been so violently severed. This new governor of the Rio de la Plata was Don Juan de Sanabria, who died before starting on the voyage, and only after many difficulties his son, Don Diego, sailed from San Lucar de Barrameda in 1549 with three ships. In one of these Hans Stade embarked, on conditions identical with those under which Ulrich Schmidt had gone to America with Don Pedro de Mendoza. The armada of Sanabria was dispersed on the voyage; its chief arrived at the Antilles, and only two of the ships reached their destination.

¹ Sir Richard Burton died in Trieste on the 20th October last, while holding the office of H.B.M. Consul.

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Sanabria, just like Alvar Nuñez, bore the king's orders to establish himself in the ports of the Atlantic coast, in proximity with the Portuguese colony of San Vicente, to take possession of the island of Santa Catalina, to found in its neighbourhood a colony on the border of the sea, in order to penetrate thence by land, crossing the whole province of Guaira, or Paraná, till he arrived at Paraguai.

The enterprise of Sanabria was, however, very unfortunate. The colonists, when their resources failed them, divided. A considerable number took refuge in the colony of San Vicente, impelled by necessity, and seduced by the Portuguese governor, Thomé de Souza. Hans Stade went with these, and as he understood something of gunnery, abandoned the Spaniards, and entered the Portuguese service as an artilleryman, when his chiefs and companions returned to Spanish territory and founded the colony of San Francisco, in $26^{\circ} 20'$ of south latitude.

The first seventeen chapters of Stade's book refer to his stay in the province of Sanabria; the remainder to the time he passed in San Vicente, and his captivity among the Tupis who inhabited the surrounding country.

These three books are, as it were, fragments of the history of the first few years of the conquest of one part of South America. The series, arranged chronologically, is as follows :—

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INTRODUCTION.

1. *The Voyage of Ulrich Schmidt*, from 1534 to 1554 ;
2. *The Commentaries of Alvar Nuñez*, from 1541 to 1544 ;
3. *The Captivity of Hans Stade*, from 1547 to 1554.

The special merit of these three works is that their authors were eye-witnesses and actors in the events they narrate.

It has seemed to me interesting and necessary to add to this volume an ethnographical map, which shows what were the indigenous tribes which occupied the country described by Schmidt, and the places in which the Guaraní family lived in that part of the province of Rio de la Plata, colonised in those days by the Spaniards. This map also shows, for the first time in the history of cartography, the demarcation of this same province entrusted by the King of Spain to his Adelantados, or governors, and the route opened by Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca on his journey from the island of Santa Catalina to Asuncion, on the Paraguai.

The name of Rio de la Plata, given by the King of Spain to a territory so vast, and differing so widely now from what it was at the time of the conquest, creates some confusion and uncertainty in the mind of the reader of the events of that period. This can only be removed by a map which shows clearly what territories were held by the Spanish

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and Portuguese by virtue of the treaty of Tordesillas. Those who are cognisant of it are but few in number. When speaking or writing of the conquest of America, it is generally believed that the only title upon which were based the conquests of Spain and Portugal was the famous Papal Bull of partition of the Ocean, of 1493. Few modern authors take into consideration that this Bull was amended, upon the petition of the King of Portugal, by the above-mentioned treaty, signed by both Powers in 1494, augmenting the portion assigned to the Portuguese in the partition made between them of the continent of America. The arc of meridian fixed by this treaty as a dividing line, which gave rise, owing to the ignorance of that age, to so many diplomatic congresses and interminable controversies, may now be traced by any student of elementary mathematics. This line is shown on the accompanying map, and runs along the meridian of $47^{\circ} 32' 56''$ west of Greenwich. The coast of the South American continent between the equator and the vicinity of the Tropic of Capricorn describes a great curve, closed on the west by the aforesaid dividing line, which enters the sea a little south of San Vicente, or Santos. West of this line were the Spanish possessions. A clear understanding on this point removes the confusion occurring at the present day, when the situation of affairs has undergone so marked a change, and explains how it is that Don Pedro de Mendoza, Alvar Nuñez, and Hans Stade remained

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at points of the coast called of Brazil, mentioned by those travellers; and how Alvar Nuñez, without leaving the province under his jurisdiction and command, marched through Spanish territory, from Santa Catalina, across the whole of Guaira, or province of Paraná, to Asuncion on the Paraguai. The name "Brazil", or "tierra del Brasil", at that time referred only to the part of the continent producing the dyewood so-called. Nearly two centuries later the Portuguese advanced towards the south, and the name "Brazil" then covered the new possessions they were acquiring, thus introducing the confusion to which I have referred.

The Voyage of Schmidt went through several editions, all incorrect, and rendered more so by the so-called elucidations and notes by their early editors. It was translated and published in Latin, English, Spanish, and other languages. These translations, however, were not made directly from the German, in which it was written, and thus the inaccuracies contained in the original were increased as they were turned into other idioms by persons who had no knowledge of the history, nor the slightest notion of the language spoken by the natives of America.

The first translation was done into Latin by Professor Gotard Arthus, for Theodore de Bry's *Collection of Voyages*, 1597; and when Levinus Hulsius prepared his collection, in 1599, he found so many defects in it, that, instead of adopting it,

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he preferred translating it afresh. This version, in which there are many alterations and suppressions of the original text, must in justice be described as not less defective than the preceding one, without, however, being quite so bad. The Latin version of Hulsius served for the subsequent translations into modern languages—for instance, for that inserted by Purchas in his *Pilgrims*.

From the same collection of Hulsius the work of Schmidt was translated from Latin into Spanish by Dr. Andreas Gonzalez de Barcia, and published with his insignificant and incorrect notes in Madrid, 1737, in his *Coleccion de Historiadores Primitivos de las Indias Occidentales*. This is the version reproduced at Buenos Ayres a century later by Don Pedro de Angelis, compiler and editor of the manuscripts of the Argentine canon, Don Saturnino Seguro.

The translation now published by the Hakluyt Society, done directly from the original German, has the merit of presenting the work genuine and entire as it left the author's hands. And as he was led into many errors of fact, proper names, geography, and chronology, the Society has done me the honour to ask me to explain them by notes and this brief Introduction.

The expedition of Don Pedro de Mendoza to the Rio de la Plata, and all the events referred to by Ulrich Schmidt, belong to the epoch of Charles V, Emperor of Germany and King of Spain. Although he was the son of a Spanish prince, this monarch

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was born at Ghent, and had been educated by Flemings. His ministers, his counsellors, the bankers who supplied him with the funds for his wars, were Flemings. Great was the favour enjoyed in Spain and Portugal by those very wealthy bankers and merchants, Fugger and Welzer of Augsburg, and Erasmus Schetzen of Antwerp. The first two had opened branches of their business at Seville, the centre at that time of trade with America, and the third had done the same at Lisbon, the metropolis of the Portuguese colonies in the Indies. The house of Erasmus Schetzen, as Hans Stade tells us, had sugar factories in the recently colonised captaincy of San Vicente, since converted into the province of San Pablo. One of his agents, Peter Rosel, had established himself there, and had acquired, in the name of Erasmus, the great factory established by the grantee, Captain-Major Martin Affonso de Souza, together with other partners.¹ Charles V had made a gift of the whole province of Caracas to the bankers Welzer, and the affairs of the Fuggers were so vast that the family name was adopted into the Castilian vernacular as *fucar*, explained by the dictionary of the language to signify a person of great wealth.

Charles V had inaugurated his reign by showing his partiality for the Flemings, by whom he was surrounded, bestowing on the Baron de la Bresa, his counsellor and majordomo mayor, the first contract

¹ Fray Gaspar da Madre de Deos, *Memorias para a historia da Capitania de S. Vicente*, 1797.

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for the exclusive privilege of introducing negro slaves into the West Indies, against the advice of his Spanish counsellors, who rejected the project of the famous protector of the Indians, Bartholomé de las Casas.¹ These favours shown to the Flemings gave rise to that picturesque phrase of Pedro Martyr de Anghiera, that the Flemings had gone with Charles V to Spain to destroy the vine after having gathered the vintage.²

This explains how the Spanish Government, exclusive and jealous of all foreign interference in its affairs in the Indies, allowed Germans and Flemings, with their vessels, their merchandise, and their men, to take part in such considerable numbers in the expedition of Don Pedro de Mendoza. The Flemings were at that time as much Charles's subjects as the Spaniards, and the owners of the ships in which Schmidt and his countrymen sailed, were bankers—allies and favourites of the young Emperor.

It appears that Schmidt was not enlisted among the soldiers of Mendoza, but came as an *employé* of the house of Welzer and Niedhart, who owned the vessel which took him. Its factor was the Fleming Heinrich Paine, and it was manned by eighty Germans. The cargo was destined to exchange for the silver which Sebastian Cabot, after his recent

¹ Antonio de Herrera, *Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos, etc.*, Década 2, Libro 2, cap. 20; Quintana, *Vida de las Casas*.

² P. Martyr, *Opus Epistolarum*, carta 703.

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voyage of discovery, had made it believed in Spain, abounded among the Indians he had encountered on the Paraguai. The Rio de Solis then took the name of Rio de la Plata, and it was this magic word that raised the desires of so many in Spain to take part in the expedition of Don Pedro de Mendoza, that it was necessary to close the lists of applicants and hasten the departure of the armada, in order to calm the fever of emigration which prevailed on this occasion among persons desirous of making their fortunes rapidly. This expedition, as the historian Fernandez de Oviedo, who saw it sail from Seville, expressed it, “was a company fit to make a goodly show in Cæsar’s army and in any part of the world.”

Don Pedro de Mendoza began by establishing himself in the port of Los Patos, at the southern extremity of the island of Santa Catalina, which was included in his jurisdiction, as may be seen on the accompanying map. He then passed to the Rio de la Plata, and, on the 11th June 1535, laid the foundations of the city of Santa Maria de Buenos Aires. Soon afterwards he nominated as his second in command his intimate friend, Juan de Ayolas, and sent him with a detachment to explore the Rio Paraná, and open a road by means of this river to the Pacific Ocean, which was the advance or front limit of his province.

The brigantines, or little feluccas in which the explorer Ayolas set forth, were under the orders of the Biscayan, Domingo Martinez de Irala, and in his

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company went Schmidt, but it is unknown in what character. In his book he acquaints us with the events that happened to that expedition, and all those in which he took part, almost always in the company of his captain, Irala, with whose fortunes he linked his own from the beginning. Our only authority for this statement is the adventurer himself who has given his name to the book. I know of no document mentioning Schmidt, nor is he noticed by the chronicler Francisco Lopez de Gomara, by his successor, Antonio de Herrera, in his history of the Indies, or by Ruy Diaz de Guzman, himself born on the Paraguai, a grandson of Domingo Martinez de Irala, or, finally, by Alvar Nuñez in his *Commentaries*.

Schmidt relates that he was present at the foundation of Buenos Aires and its desertion six years afterwards, by order of Irala, who possessed himself of the command after the deaths of Don Pedro de Mendoza and his lieutenant Ayolas. Schmidt was also present at the events which took place during the governorship of the second Adelantado, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, from 1541 to 1544. He assisted at his violent overthrow and deportation under the direction of Irala, made all the journeys of exploration which, starting from Asuncion, ascended the Rio Paraguai to Matto Grosso, and explored all the country of the Cheriguanos, now known by the name of Moxos and Chiquitos, to the confines of Peru. He remained with Irala till the arrival on the Atlantic coast of the expedition of the

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Adelantado Sanabria, with whom Hans Stade sailed to America.

At the end of twenty years of travels and strange adventures, of combats with Indians, of anarchy, poverty, and disorder among the conquerors of Paraguai, when Domingo de Irala, by force of audacity and machiavelism, had definitely possessed himself of the government of this unfortunate colony, obtaining, a short while afterwards, the royal title of Governor, his faithful and inseparable companion Schmidt received a letter from the banker Niedhart, transmitted to him from Seville by the agent there of the wealthy Fugger, in which he begged him to return to Antwerp. Schmidt obtained leave of absence from his chief, set out on his journey, with six deserters and twenty of his Indian slaves, by the rivers Paraguai and Paraná to the river Iguazú, and thence crossed the province of Guaira by the route opened by Alvar Nuñez, arriving at the Portuguese colony of San Vicente. Here he met with the agent of Erasmus Schetzen, who gave him a passage to Lisbon in a vessel belonging to his principal, which was laden with a cargo of sugar and brazil wood. Schmidt landed at Antwerp on the 25th January 1554, as I have already said.

Hans Stade was a prisoner of the Tapiis, or Tupis, in the immediate vicinity of San Vicente, when Schmidt passed that way on his homeward journey, and only succeeded in obtaining his liberty one year later, embarking at Rio de Janeiro on one of the

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French ships which trafficked with the Indians occupying that magnificent bay. His adventures during his captivity were published at Marburg in 1557. It is very strange, therefore, that Schmidt should not make the slightest mention of his countryman, though he also was acquainted with Peter Rosel, agent of Erasmus Schetzen, in the Portuguese colony. It would seem most natural that they should have spoken on the misfortunes that had befallen Stade, and on the various fruitless efforts made to rescue him from captivity, and as to the means to be employed in order to restore him to his country. Not a word of all this do we find in Schmidt's narrative.

The voyage of Ulrich Schmidt to the Rio de la Plata was published, as we have seen, at Frankfort-on-Maine in 1567, in the collection of Sebastian Franck, wherein also appeared for the second time that of Stade, side by side with his countryman Schmidt's. This proves the interest taken in these narratives of travel in those days of theological controversies and religious wars, when the French Protestants were trying to set foot in Brazil, while Villegaignon, under the protection of Coligny, was taking possession of the port of Rio de Janeiro, one year after the abdication of Charles V and the accession to the throne of the sombre Philip II, whose tyranny became very soon insupportable in the Low Countries, which fell under his dominion by inheritance from his father.