



“There Can Easily Be Stamped Upon Them Whatever Belief We Wish to Give Them”

The First Letter from Brazil

(1500)

When in late April 1500 a Portuguese captain and his fleet made landfall on the coast of what is now called Brazil, they did so by chance—a chance beginning to a colony that eventually would produce fabulous wealth for Portugal. The fleet had sailed from Lisbon for India six weeks earlier amid great festivities: “colored flags” decorated the ships, and musicians playing “bagpipes, fifes, drums, and horns” delighted the crowd. All Lisbon came to wish them a good journey. The bishop offered a pontifical Mass; King Manuel I issued final instructions to his commander, Pedro Alvares Cabral, and presented him with a banner bearing the royal arms. The next day, as the unfurled sails were set, the red cross of the Order of Christ blazoned across white canvas declared to all the unity of Crown, Church, and military, a reminder of the king’s right as governor of the order to exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction in newly contacted and as-yet undiscovered territories.

Commoners as well as noblemen, hopeful that some of the new wealth would trickle their way, had reason to celebrate the departure of this fleet headed for the rich and long-coveted spice trade of the East. The ships’

captains intended to repeat Vasco da Gama’s voyage of two years earlier around the Cape of Good Hope to Calicut on the west coast of India where, da Gama assured them, they would find Christians willing to ally and trade with them as fellow believers against Muslims. Furious preparations had been under way, since da Gama’s return the previous year, to assemble a fleet for what would be the longest voyage yet undertaken.

The result was impressive: thirteen ships, including “round” ships with their “wide bulging sails” and the faster, lighter lateen-rigged caravels; a crew of 1,200 men; provisions meant to last eighteen months; and a cargo of cheap trade goods as well as copper, fine woolens, satins, and velvets, and gold currency. Seven Franciscan friars, eight priests, and a vicar, some of whom expected to remain in India, accompanied the crew, together with the factors and their assistants who had charge of the cargo and of establishing a permanent factory at Calicut, at least thirteen scribes, and interpreters. This voyage was financed differently from the commercial expeditions leased to merchants typical of the fifteenth century. The crew were paid rather

than having to wait on the king's pleasure for a reward for their service once back in Portugal. And except for two ships—one owned by Italian merchants and another by a Portuguese noble—the Crown financed and outfitted them all, assumed the risk, and expected to collect the profits. The captains were well chosen. Experienced navigators and pilots figured prominently among them, notably Bartolomeu Dias, the first European to sail around the tip of Africa in 1488, and Pero Escolar, João de Sá, and Nicolau Coelho, who had sailed with Vasco da Gama—all men of reputation, authority, or promise.

Relying on da Gama's experience and critical navigational observations, Cabral's ships were to sail the same route south from Lisbon to the Canary Islands, then skirt the Cape Verde Islands and roughly parallel the African coast until looping south and west in order to avoid the deadly "Guinea calms," or doldrums, before again heading southeast toward the cape. Instead, winds and currents carried them farther west than planned: the landmass they sighted in late April was both unexpected and unknown. They travelled a short stretch of the coast, dropping anchor at the place they called Porto Seguro, or safe harbor, where they stayed for nine days. They then sailed east again to Africa and on to a disastrous, though commercially lucrative, encounter at Calicut, not with Christians but with an unaccommodating Hindu sovereign and hostile Arab traders who, in the Portuguese account, provoked an uprising of local people who stormed their factory, killing some fifty Portuguese. Cabral's men retaliated by seizing Arab ships, killing most of the crews, and stealing their cargos before bombarding the city. And if, on their return to Lisbon, the cargoes yielded profit and encouragement to others in Europe, the longed-for trade would now be possible only under arms. In India no friars remained to christianize, and no factory to conduct trade. Only seven of the original thirteen ships made it back to Lisbon; six were lost at sea. The dazzling success imagined by well-wishers in March 1500 had instead become a diminished and sobering one.

The fleet's brief stop on the Brazilian coast reads differently. Before leaving Porto Seguro, Cabral dispatched a supply ship to return to Lisbon with news of the landmass, which they named the Land of the True Cross. No one knows how many letters this ship carried back to the king, but only two are known to have survived: a more technical one, and this one written by the fleet's chief scribe, Pedro Vaz de Caminha. Born in northern Portugal into a family of officials who for generations had served a succession of kings, Caminha, who was adequately educated, inherited the position from his father. Having signed on as scribe for the outward voyage, Caminha expected to remain and serve in Calicut in the administration of the factory and the anticipated India trade, clearly a position of responsibility and royal favor. Instead he died in the uprising at Calicut in December 1500, his Brazil letter by then safely in the king's hands.

Written over the course of the nine days they anchored in Porto Seguro—it is too long to have been written on any single day, and certainly not on the day it is dated when busy preparations for the next morning's departure would have occupied them all—Caminha's letter speaks with the seductively compelling authority of someone who has seen for himself. He witnessed and recorded the first contact between Europeans and Tupinikin, the Tupi-speaking natives of the northeastern Brazilian coast, when early moments of mutual surprise, alert curiosity, caution, and even small increments of trust were possible before defensive positions formed or hardened (or needed to) and improvisation was essential. It is the only firsthand account that survives, our only source from which to retrieve both Portuguese and native understandings of this unexpected encounter. For the Tupinikin, who had never before come face-to-face with people so unlike themselves, it was an unimaginable one.

What can we make of it? As each people circles the other, trying to take the other's measure, what cultural yardsticks are used? What did the exchange of gifts imply? Do we have to settle for a standard Portuguese

response or a standard Tupinikin response, or does Caminha offer evidence, however imperfect, for variations within each group? Native bodies, sleek, hairless, naked, sometimes dramatically painted, fascinated Caminha; he returns to them again and again and especially to what he takes to be the Tupinikin's lack of shame. But what clues offer us a glimpse of how European bodies, bearded, booted, and covered in cumbersome clothes, appeared to native eyes? What was the difference between dress and adornment? What

shifts in action, demeanor, or strategy by either group are discernible over the nine days and nights? What tensions surfaced? How was power displayed or restrained? And how do we account for what perhaps initially most surprises us: the absence of violence?

In the end, Caminha judged these natives suitable for conversion: "there can easily be stamped upon them whatever belief we wish to give them." What persuaded him? And what does this suggest about Portuguese or Tupinikin sensibilities?

~ Letter of Pedro Vaz de Caminha to King Manuel, Porto Seguro de Vera Cruz, May 1, 1500

Senhor:

Although the chief captain of this your fleet, and also the other captains, are writing to Your Highness the news of the finding of this your new land which was now found in this navigation, I shall not refrain from also giving my account of this to Your Highness, as best I can, although I know less than all of the others how to relate and tell it well. Nevertheless, may Your Highness take my ignorance for good intention, and believe that I shall not set down here anything more than I saw and thought, either to beautify or to make it less attractive. I shall not give an account here to Your Highness of the ship's company and its daily runs, because I shall not know how to do it, and the pilots must have this in their charge.

And therefore, Senhor, I begin what I have to relate and say that the departure from Belem, as Your Highness knows, was on Monday, the 9th of March, and on Saturday, the 14th of the said month, between eight and nine o'clock, we found ourselves among the Canary Islands, nearest to Grand Canary; and there we remained all that day in a calm, in sight of them, at a distance of about three or four leagues. On Sunday, the 22d of the said month, at ten o'clock, a little more or less, we came in sight of the Cape Verde Islands, that is to say, of the island of Sam Nicolao, according to the assertion of Pero Escolar, the pilot. On the following night, on Monday at daybreak, Vasco d'Atayde with his ship was lost from the fleet without there being heavy weather or contrary winds to account for it. The captain used all diligence to find him, seeking everywhere, but he did not appear again. And so we followed our route over this sea until Tuesday of the octave of Easter, which was the 21st of April, when we came upon some signs of land, being then distant from the said island, as the pilots said, some six hundred and sixty or six hundred and seventy leagues; these signs were a great quantity of long weeds, which mariners call *botelho*, and others as well which they also call *rabo de asno*. And on the following Wednesday, in the morning, we met with birds which they call *fura buchos*. On this same day at the Vesper hours we caught sight of land, that

is, first of a large mountain, very high and round, and of other lower lands to the south of it, and of flat land, with great groves of trees. To this high mountain the captain gave the name of *Monte Pascoal*, and to the land, *Terra da Vera Cruz*. He ordered the lead to be thrown. They found 25 fathoms; and at sunset, some six leagues from land, we cast anchor in 19 fathoms, a clean anchorage. There we remained all that night, and on Thursday morning we made sail and steered straight to the land, with the small ships going in front, in 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, and 9 fathoms, until half a league from shore, where we all cast anchor in front of the mouth of a river. And we arrived at this anchorage at ten o'clock, more or less. And from there we caught sight of men who were going along the shore, some seven or eight, as those on the small ships said, because they arrived there first. We there launched the boats and skiffs, and immediately all the captains of the ships came to this ship of the chief captain, and there they talked. And the captain sent Nicolao Coelho on shore in a boat to see that river. And as soon as he began to go thither, men assembled on the shore, by twos and threes, so that when the boat reached the mouth of the river eighteen or twenty men were already there. They were dark, and entirely naked, without anything to cover their shame. They carried in their hands bows with their arrows. All came boldly towards the boat, and Nicolao Coelho made a sign to them that they should lay down their bows, and they laid them down. He could not have any speech with them there, nor understanding which might be profitable, because of the breaking of the sea on the shore. He gave them only a red cap and a cap of linen, which he was wearing on his head, and a black hat. And one of them gave him a hat of long bird feathers with a little tuft of red and grey feathers like those of a parrot. And another gave him a large string of very white beads which look like seed pearls; these articles I believe the captain is sending to Your Highness. And with this he returned to the ships because it was late and he could have no further speech with them on account of the sea. On the following night it blew so hard from the southeast with showers that it made the ships drift, especially the flagship.

And on Friday morning, at eight o'clock, a little more or less, on the advice of the pilots, the captain ordered the anchors to be raised and to set sail. And we went northward along the coast with the boats and skiffs tied to the poop [stern], to see whether we could find some shelter and good anchorage where we might lie, to take on water and wood, not because we were in need of them then, but to provide ourselves here. And when we set sail there were already some sixty or seventy men on the shore, sitting near the river, who had gathered there little by little. We continued along the coast and the captain ordered the small vessels to go in closer to the land, and to strike sail if they found a secure anchorage for the ships. And when we were some ten leagues along the coast from where we had raised anchor, the small vessels found a reef within which was a harbour, very good and secure [*seguro*] with a very wide entrance. And they went in and lowered their sails. And gradually the ships arrived after them, and a little before sunset they also struck sail about a league from the reef, and anchored in 11 fathoms. And by the captain's order our pilot, Affonso Lopez, who was in one of those small vessels and was an alert and dexterous man for this, straightaway entered the skiff to take soundings

in the harbour. And he captured two well-built natives who were in a canoe. One of them was carrying a bow and six or seven arrows, and many others went about on the shore with bows and arrows and they did not use them. Then, since it was already night, he took two men to the flagship, where they were received with much pleasure and festivity.

In appearance they are dark, somewhat reddish, with good faces and good noses, well shaped. They go naked, without any covering; neither do they pay more attention to concealing or exposing their shame than they do to showing their faces, and in this respect they are very innocent. Both had their lower lips bored and in them were placed pieces of white bone, the length of a handbreadth, and the thickness of a cotton spindle and as sharp as an awl at the end. They put them through the inner part of the lip, and that part which remains between the lip and the teeth is shaped like a rook in chess. And they carry it there enclosed in such a manner that it does not hurt them, nor does it embarrass them in speaking, eating, or drinking. Their hair is smooth, and they were shorn, with the hair cut higher than a comb of good size, and shaved to above the ears. And one of them was wearing below the opening, from temple to temple towards the back, a sort of wig of yellow birds' feathers, which must have been the length of a *couto* [possibly meaning the width of the hand with the thumb extended], very thick and very tight, and it covered the back of the head and the ears. This was glued to his hair, feather by feather, with a material as soft as wax, but it was not wax. Thus the head-dress was very round and very close and very equal, so that it was not necessary to remove it when they washed.

When they came on board, the captain, well dressed, with a very large collar of gold around his neck, was seated in a chair, with a carpet at his feet as a platform. And Sancho de Toar and Simam de Miranda and Nicolao Coelho and Aires Correa and the rest of us who were in the ship with him were seated on the floor on this carpet. Torches were lighted and they entered, and made no sign of courtesy or of speaking to the captain or to any one, but one of them caught sight of the captain's collar, and began to point with his hand towards the land and then to the collar, as though he were telling us that there was gold in the land. And he also saw a silver candlestick, and in the same manner he made a sign towards the land and then towards the candlestick, as though there were silver also. They showed them a grey parrot which the captain brought here; they at once took it into their hands and pointed towards the land, as though they were found there. They showed them a sheep, but they paid no attention to it. They showed them a hen; they were almost afraid of it, and did not want to touch it; and afterwards they took it as though frightened. Then food was given them: bread and boiled fish, comfits, little cakes, honey, and dried figs. They would eat scarcely anything of that, and if they did taste some things they threw them out. Wine was brought them in a cup; they put a little to their mouths, and did not like it at all, nor did they want any more. Water was brought them in a jar; they took a mouthful of it, and did not drink it; they only washed their mouths and spat it out. One of them saw some white rosary beads; he made a motion that they should give them to him, and he played much with them, and put them around his neck; and then he took them off and wrapped them

around his arm. He made a sign towards the land and then to the beads and to the collar of the captain, as if to say that they would give gold for that. We interpreted this so, because we wished to, but if he meant that he would take the beads and also the collar, we did not wish to understand because we did not intend to give it to him. And afterwards he returned the beads to the one who gave them to him. And then they stretched themselves out on their backs on the carpet to sleep without taking any care to cover their privy parts, which were not circumcised, and the hair on them was well shaved and arranged. The captain ordered pillows to be put under the head of each one, and he with the head-dress took sufficient pains not to disarrange it. A mantle was thrown over them, and they permitted it and lay at rest and slept.

On Saturday morning the captain ordered sails to be set and we went to seek the entrance, which was very wide and deep, 6 or 7 fathoms, and all the ships entered within and anchored in 5 or 6 fathoms; this anchorage inside is so large and so beautiful and so secure that more than two hundred large and small ships could lie within it. And as soon as the ships were in place and anchored, all the captains came to this ship of the chief captain, and from here the captain ordered Nicolao Coelho and Bertolameu Dias to go on shore, and they took those two men, let them go with their bows and arrows. To each of them he ordered new shirts and red hats and two rosaries of white bone beads to be given and they carried them on their arms, with rattles and bells. And he sent with them to remain there a young convict, named Affonso Ribeiro, the servant of Dom Joham Tello, to stay with them, and learn their manner of living and customs; and he ordered me to go with Nicolao Coelho. We went at once straight for the shore. At that place there assembled at once some two hundred men, all naked, and with bows and arrows in their hands. Those whom we were bringing made signs to them that they should draw back and put down their bows, and they put them down, and did not draw back much. It is enough to say that they put down their bows. And then those whom we brought, and the young convict with them, got out. As soon as they were out they did not stop again, nor did one wait for the other; rather, they ran, each as fast as he could. And they and many others with them passed a river which flows here with sweet and abundant water which came up as far as their waists. And thus they went running on the other side of the river between some clumps of palms, where were others, and there they stopped. And there, too, the young convict went with a man who, immediately upon his leaving the boat, befriended him, and took him thither. And then they brought him back to us, and with him came the others whom we had brought. These were now naked and without caps. And then many began to arrive, and entered into the boats from the seashore, until no more could get in. And they carried water gourds and took some kegs which we brought and filled them with water and carried them to the boats. They did not actually enter the boat, but from near by, threw them in by hand and we took them, and they asked us to give them something. Nicolao Coelho had brought bells and bracelets and to some he gave a bell and to others a bracelet, so that with that inducement they almost wished to help us. They gave us some of those bows and arrows for hats and linen caps, and for whatever we were willing to give them. From thence the other two youths departed and we never saw them again.

Many of them, or perhaps the greater number of those who were there, wore those beaks of bone in their lips, and some, who were without them, had their lips pierced, and in the holes they carried wooden plugs which looked like stoppers of bottles. And some of them carried three of those beaks, namely, one in the middle and two at the ends. And others were there whose bodies were quartered in colour, that is, half of them in their own colour, and half in a bluish-black dye, and others quartered in a checkered pattern. There were among them three or four girls, very young and very pretty, with very dark hair, long over the shoulders, and their privy parts so high, so closed, and so free from hair that we felt no shame in looking at them very well. Then for the time there was no more speech or understanding with them, because their barbarity was so great that no one could either be understood or heard. We made signs for them to leave, and they did so, and went to the other side of the river. And three or four of our men left the boats and filled I do not know how many kegs of water which we carried, and we returned to the ships. And upon seeing us thus, they made signs for us to return. We returned and they sent the convict and did not wish him to stay there with them. He carried a small basin and two or three red caps to give to their chief, if there was one. They did not care to take anything from him and thus they sent him back with everything, and then Bertolameu Dias made him return again to give those things to them, and he returned and gave them in our presence, to the one who had first befriended him. And then he came away and we took him with us. The man who befriended him was now well on in years, and was well decked with ornaments and covered with feathers which stuck to his body, so that he looked pierced with arrows like Saint Sebastian. Others wore caps of yellow feathers, others of red, others of green; and one of the girls was all painted from head to foot with that paint, and she was so well built and so rounded and her lack of shame was so charming, that many women of our land seeing such attractions, would be ashamed that theirs were not like hers. None of them were circumcised, but all were as we are. And, thereupon, we returned, and they went away.

In the afternoon the chief captain set out in his boat with all of us and with the other captains of the ships in their boats to amuse ourselves in the bay near the shore. But no one went on land, because the captain did not wish it, although there was no one there; only he and all [of us] landed on a large island in the bay, which is very empty at low tide, but on all sides it is surrounded by water so that no one can go to it without a boat or by swimming. There he and the rest of us had a good time for an hour and a half, and the mariners fished there, going out with a net, and they caught a few small fish. And then, since it was already night, we returned to the ships.

On Low Sunday in the morning the captain determined to go to that island to hear Mass and a sermon, and he ordered all the captains to assemble in the boats and to go with him; and so it was done. He ordered a large tent to be set up on the island and within it a very well-provided altar to be placed, and there with all the rest of us he had Mass said, which the father, Frei Amrique, intoned and all the other fathers and priests who were there accompanied him with the same voice. That Mass, in my opinion, was heard by all with much pleasure and devotion. The

captain had there with him the banner of Christ, with which he left Belem, and it was kept raised on the Gospel side [of the altar]. After the Mass was finished, the father removed his vestments and sat down in a high chair, and we all threw ourselves down on that sand, and he preached a solemn and profitable sermon on the history of the Gospel, and at the end of it he dealt with our coming and with the discovery of this land, and referred to the sign of the Cross in obedience to which we came; which was very fitting, and which inspired much devotion.

While we were at Mass and at the sermon, about the same number of people were on the shore as yesterday with their bows and arrows, who were amusing themselves and watching us; and they sat down, and when the Mass was finished and we were seated for the sermon, many of those arose and blew a horn or trumpet and began to leap and to dance for a while, and some of them placed themselves in two or three *almadias* [rafts] which they had there. These are not made like those I have already seen; they are simply three logs fastened together, and four or five, or all who wanted to, entered them, scarcely moving away at all from the land, but only far enough to keep their footing. After the sermon was finished the captain and all the rest proceeded to the boats with our banner displayed and we embarked, and thus we all went towards the land, to pass along it where they were, Bertolameu Dias going ahead in his skiff, at the captain's order, with a piece of timber from an *almadia* which the sea had carried to them, to give it to them. And all of us were about a stone's throw behind him. When they saw the skiff of Bertolameu Dias, all of them came at once to the water, going into it as far as they could. A sign was made to them to put down their bows, and many of them went at once to put them down on shore and others did not put them down. There was one there who spoke much to the others, telling them to go away, but they did not, in my opinion, have respect or fear of him. This one who was telling them to move carried his bow and arrows, and was painted with red paint on his breasts and shoulder blades and hips, thighs, and legs, all the way down, and the unpainted places such as the stomach and belly were of their own colour, and the paint was so red that the water did not wash away or remove it, but rather when he came out of the water he was redder. One of our men left the skiff of Bertolameu Dias and went among them, without their thinking for a moment of doing him harm; on the contrary, they gave him gourds of water and beckoned to those on the skiff to come on land. Thereupon Bertolameu Dias returned to the captain, and we came to the ships to eat, playing trumpets and pipes without troubling them further. And they again sat down on the shore and thus they remained for a while. On this island where we went to hear Mass and the sermon the water ebbs a great deal and uncovers much sand and much gravel. While we were there some went to look for shellfish, but did not find them; they found some thick and short shrimps. Among them was a very large and very fat shrimp such as I had never seen before. They also found shells of cockles and mussels, but did not discover any whole piece. And as soon as we had eaten, all the captains came to this ship at the command of the chief captain and he went to one side with them and I was there too, and he asked all of us whether it seemed well to us to send news of the finding of this land to Your Highness by the supply ship, so that you might order it to be better

reconnoitred, and learn more about it than we could now learn because we were going on our way. And among the many speeches that were made regarding the matter, it was said by all or by the greater number, that it would be very well to do so; and to this they agreed. And as soon as the decision was made, he asked further whether it would be well to take here by force two of these men to send to Your Highness and to leave here in their place two convicts. In this matter they agreed that it was not necessary to take men by force, since it was the general custom that those taken away by force to another place said that everything about which they are asked was there; and that these two convicts whom we should leave would give better and far better information about the land than would be given by those carried away by us, because they are people whom no one understands nor would they learn [Portuguese] quickly enough to be able to tell it as well as those others [whom] Your Highness sends here, and that consequently we should not attempt to take any one away from here by force nor cause any scandal, but in order to tame and pacify them all the more, we should simply leave here the two convicts when we departed. And thus it was determined, since it appeared better to all.

When this was finished the captain ordered us to go to land in our boats in order to ascertain as well as possible what the river was like, and also to divert ourselves. We all went ashore in our boats, armed, and the banner with us. The natives went there along the shore to the mouth of the river where we were going, and before we arrived, in accordance with the instructions they had received before, they all laid down their bows and made signs for us to land. And as soon as the boats had put their bows on shore, they all went immediately to the other side of the river, which is not wider than the throw of a short staff; and as soon as we disembarked some of our men crossed the river at once and went among them, and some waited and others withdrew, but the result was that we were all intermingled. They gave us some of their bows with their arrows in exchange for hats and linen caps and for anything else which we gave them. So many of our men went to the other side and mingled with them that they withdrew and went away and some went above to where others were. And then the captain had himself carried on the shoulders of two men and crossed the river and made every one return. The people who were there could not have been more than the usual number, and when the captain made all return, some of them came to him, not to recognize him for their lord, for it does not seem to me that they understand or have knowledge of this, but because our people were already passing to this side of the river. There they talked and brought many bows and beads of the kind already mentioned, and trafficked in anything in such manner that many bows, arrows, and beads were brought from there to the ships. And then the captain returned to this side of the river, and many men came to its bank. There you might have seen gallants painted with black and red, and with quarterings both on their bodies and on their legs, which certainly was pleasing in appearance. There were also among them four or five young women just as naked, who were not displeasing to the eye, among whom was one with her thigh from the knee to the hip and buttock all painted with that black paint and all the rest in her own colour; another had both knees and calves and ankles so painted, and her privy parts so nude and exposed

with such innocence that there was not there any shame. There was also another young woman carrying an infant boy or girl tied at her breasts by a cloth of some sort so that only its little legs showed. But the legs of the mother and the rest of her were not concealed by any cloth.

And afterwards the captain moved up along the river, which flows continuously even with the shore, and there an old man was waiting who carried in his hand the oar of an *almadia*. When the captain reached him he spoke in our presence, without any one understanding him, nor did he understand us with reference to the things he was asked about, particularly gold, for we wished to know whether they had any in this land. This old man had his lip so bored that a large thumb could be thrust through the hole, and in the opening he carried a worthless green stone which closed it on the outside. And the captain made him take it out; and I do not know what devil spoke to him, but he went with it to put it in the captain's mouth. We laughed a little at this and then the captain got tired and left him; and one of our men gave him an old hat for the stone, not because it was worth anything but to show. And afterwards the captain got it, I believe, to send it with the other things to Your Highness. We went along there looking at the river, which has much and very good water. Along it are many palms, not very high, in which there are many good sprouts. We gathered and ate many of them. Then the captain turned towards the mouth of the river where we had disembarked, and on the other side of the river were many of them, dancing and diverting themselves before one another, without taking each other by the hand, and they did it well. Then Diogo Dias, who was revenue officer of Sacavem, crossed the river. He is an agreeable and pleasure-loving man, and he took with him one of our bagpipe players and his bagpipe, and began to dance among them, taking them by the hands, and they were delighted and laughed and accompanied him very well to the sound of the pipe. After they had danced he went along the level ground, making many light turns and a remarkable leap which astonished them, and they laughed and enjoyed themselves greatly. And although he reassured and flattered them a great deal with this, they soon became sullen like wild men and went away upstream. And then the captain crossed over the river with all of us, and we went along the shore, the boats going along close to land, and we came to a large lake of sweet water which is near the seashore, because all that shore is marshy above and the water flows out in many places. And after we had crossed the river some seven or eight of the natives joined our sailors who were retiring to the boats. And they took from there a shark which Bertolameu Dias killed and brought to them and threw on the shore. It suffices to say that up to this time, although they were somewhat tamed, a moment afterwards they became frightened like sparrows at a feeding-place. And no one dared to speak strongly to them for fear they might be more frightened; and everything was done to their liking in order to tame them thoroughly. To the old man with whom the captain spoke he gave a red cap: and in spite of all the talking that he did with him, and the cap which he gave him, as soon as he left and began to cross the river, he immediately became more cautious and would not return again to this side of it. The other two whom the captain had on the ships, and to whom he gave what has already been mentioned, did not appear

again, from which I infer that they are bestial people and of very little knowledge; and for this reason they are so timid. Yet withal they are well cared for and very clean, and in this it seems to me that they are rather like birds or wild animals, to which the air gives better feathers and better hair than to tame ones. And their bodies are so clean and so fat and so beautiful that they could not be more so; and this causes me to presume that they have no houses or dwellings in which to gather, and the air in which they are brought up makes them so. Nor indeed have we, up to this time, seen any houses or anything which looks like them. The captain ordered the convict, Affonso Ribeiro, to go with them again, which he did. And he went there a good distance, and in the afternoon he returned, for they had made him come and were not willing to keep him there; and they had given him bows and arrows and had not taken from him anything which was his. On the contrary, he said, one of them had taken from him some yellow beads which he was wearing and fled with them; and he complained and the others at once went after him and returned to give them back to him. And then they ordered him to go back. He said that he had not seen there among them anything but some thatched huts of green branches, and made very large, like those of Entre Doiro e Minho [the northern province of Portugal and Caminha's homeland]. And thus we returned to the ships to sleep when it was already almost night.

On Monday after eating we all disembarked to take on water. Then many came there, but not so many as at the other times, and now they were carrying very few bows and they kept a little apart from us, and afterwards little by little mingled with us. And they embraced us and had a good time; and some of them soon slunk away. They gave there some bows for sheets of paper and for some worthless old cap, or for anything else. And in such a manner it came about that a good twenty or thirty of our people went with them to where many others of them were, with girls and women, and brought back many bows and caps of bird feathers, some green and some yellow, samples of which I believe the captain will send to Your Highness. And according to what those said who went there they made merry with them. On that day we saw them closer and more as we wished, for all of us were almost intermingled. And there some of them had those colours in quarters, others in halves, and others in such colours as in the tapestry of Arras, and all with their lips pierced, and many with the bones in them, and some of them without bones. Some of them were carrying prickly green nut shells from trees, which in colour resembled chestnuts, except that they were very much smaller. And these were full of small red grains which, when crushed between the fingers, made a very red paint with which they were painted. And the more they wetted themselves the redder they became. They are all shaved to above the ears, likewise their eyebrows and eyelashes. All of them have their foreheads from temple to temple painted with a black paint, which looks like a black ribbon the breadth of two fingers.

And the captain ordered that convict, Affonso Ribeiro, and two other convicts to go there among them, and likewise Diogo Dias, because he was a cheerful man, with whom they played. And he ordered the convicts to remain there that night. They all went there and mingled with them, and as they said later, they went a good league and a half to a village of houses in which there must have been nine or ten

dwellings, each of which they said was as long as the captain's ship. And they were of wood with sides of boards and covered with straw, of reasonable height, and all had one single room without any divisions. They had within many posts, and from post to post a net is tied by the ends to each post, high up, where they sleep. And underneath they made their fires to warm themselves. And each house had two small doors, one at one end, and another at the other. And they said that thirty or forty persons dwelt in each house, and that thus they found them. And that they gave them to eat of the food which they had, namely, much manioc and other roots which are in the land, that they eat.

And, as it was late, they presently made all of us return and did not wish any one to remain there; and also, as they said, they wished to come with us. They traded there, for bells and for other trifles of little value which we were carrying, very large and beautiful red parrots and two little green ones and caps of green feathers and a cloth of feathers of many colours, woven in a very beautiful fashion. All of these things Your Highness will see, because the captain will send them to you, as he says. And thereupon they came back and we returned to the ships.

On Tuesday, after eating, we landed to set a watch over the wood and to wash clothes. Some sixty or seventy men without bows or anything else were there on the shore when we reached it. As soon as we arrived they at once came to us without being frightened, and afterward many more came. There must have been a good two hundred, all without bows, and they all mingled so much with us that some of them helped us to load wood and put it in the boats, and they vied with us and derived much pleasure therefrom. And while we were taking on the wood two carpenters made a large cross from one piece of wood which was cut yesterday for this. Many of them came there to be with the carpenters; and I believe that they did this more to see the iron tools with which they were making it than to see the cross, because they have nothing of iron. And they cut their wood and boards with stones shaped like wedges put into a piece of wood, very well tied between two sticks, and in such a manner that they are strong, according to what the men said who were at their houses yesterday, for they saw them there. By now they kept us so much company as almost to disturb us in what we had to do. And the captain ordered the two convicts and Diogo Dias to go to the village, and to other villages if they should hear of them, and on no account to come to sleep on the ships, even if they should order them to; and so they went. While we were in this grove cutting wood some parrots flew across the trees, some of them green, and others grey, large and small, so that it seems to me that there must be many in this land, but I did not see more than about nine or ten. We did not then see other birds except some *pombas seixas*, and they seemed to me considerably larger than those of Portugal. Some said that they saw turtle-doves, but I did not see any; but since the groves are so numerous and so large and of such infinite variety, I do not doubt that in the interior there are many birds. And towards night we returned to the ships with our wood. I believe, Senhor, that heretofore I have not given account to Your Highness of the form of their bows and arrows. The bows are black and long and the arrows long, and their tips of pointed reeds, as Your Highness will see from some which I believe the captain will send to you.

On Wednesday we did not go on shore, because the captain spent the whole day in the supply ship emptying it, and had transported to the ship what each one could carry. Many of the natives came to the shore, as we saw from the ships. There must have been some three hundred, according to what Sancho de Toar said, who was there. Diogo Dias and Affonso Ribeiro, the convict, whom the captain sent yesterday to sleep there at any cost, returned when it was already night because they did not want him to sleep there, and they found green parrots and other birds which were black, almost like magpies, except that they had white beaks and short tails. And when Sancho de Toar returned to the ship, some of them wished to go with him; but he did not want any except two proper youths. He ordered them to be well fed and cared for that night, and they ate all the food which was given them, and he ordered a bed with sheets to be made for them, as he said, and they slept and were comfortable that night. And so nothing more happened that day to write about.

On Thursday, the last of April, we ate early in the morning and went on shore for more wood and water, and when the captain was about to leave his ship Sancho de Toar arrived with his two guests, and because he had not yet eaten, cloths were laid for him and food was brought, and he ate. We seated the guests in their chairs, and they ate very well of all which was given them, especially of cold boiled ham and rice. They did not give them wine, because Sancho de Toar said that they did not drink it well. After the meal was over we all entered the boat and they with us. A sailor gave one of them a large tusk of a wild boar, well turned up. And as soon as he took it he at once put it in his lip; and because it did not fit there, they gave him a small piece of red wax. And this he applied to the back of his ornament to hold it and put it into his lip with the point turned upward, and he was as pleased with it as though he had a great jewel. And as soon as we disembarked he at once went off with it, and did not appear there again. When we landed there were probably eight or ten of the natives about, and little by little others began to come. And it seems to me that that day there came to the shore four hundred or four hundred and fifty men. Some of them carried bows and arrows and gave all for caps and for anything which we gave them. They ate with us of what we gave them. Some of them drank wine and others could not drink it, but it seems to me that if they accustomed themselves to it, they would drink it with great willingness. All were so well disposed and so well built and smart with their paints that they made a good show. They loaded as much of that wood as they could, very willingly, and carried it to the boats, and were quieter and more at ease among us than we were among them. The captain went with some of us for a short distance through this grove to a large stream of much water, which in our opinion was the same as the one which runs down to the shore, from which we took water. There we stayed for a while, drinking and amusing ourselves beside the river in this grove, which is so large and so thick and of such abundant foliage that one cannot describe it. In it there are many palms, from which we gathered many good sprouts. When we disembarked, the captain said that it would be well to go directly to the cross, which was leaning against a tree near the river, to be set up the next day, which was Friday, and that we should all kneel down and kiss it so that they might see the

respect which we had for it. And thus we did. And we motioned to those ten or twelve who were there that they should do the same, and at once they all went to kiss it. They seem to me people of such innocence that if one could understand them and they us, they would soon be Christians, because they do not have or understand any belief, as it appears. And therefore, if the convicts who are to remain here will learn their language well and understand them, I do not doubt that they will become Christians, in accordance with the pious intent of Your Highness, and that they will believe in our Holy Faith, to which may it please Our Lord to bring them. For it is certain this people is good and of pure simplicity, and there can easily be stamped upon them whatever belief we wish to give them; and furthermore, Our Lord gave them fine bodies and good faces as to good men; and He who brought us here, I believe, did not do so without purpose. And consequently, Your Highness, since you so much desire to increase the Holy Catholic Faith, ought to look after their salvation, and it will please God that, with little effort, this will be accomplished.

They do not till the soil or breed stock, nor is there ox or cow, or goat, or sheep, or hen, or any other domestic animal which is accustomed to live with men; nor do they eat anything except this manioc, of which there is much, and of the seeds and the fruits which the earth and the trees produce. Nevertheless, with this they are stronger and better fed than we are with all the wheat and vegetables which we eat.

While they were there that day, they continually skipped and danced with us to the sound of one of our tambours, in such a manner that they are much more our friends than we theirs. If one signed to them whether they wished to come to the ships, they at once made ready to do so, in such wise that had we wished to invite them all, they would all have come. However, we only took four or five this night to the ships, namely, the chief captain took two, and Simam de Miranda, one, whom he already had for his page, and Aires Gomes [*sic*], another, also as a page. One of those whom the captain took was one of his guests whom we had brought him the first night when we arrived; to-day he came dressed in his shirt and with him his brother. These were this night very well entertained, both with food and with a bed with mattress and sheets to tame them better.

And to-day, which is Friday, the first day of May, we went on land with our banner in the morning and disembarked up the river towards the south, where it seemed to us that it would be better to plant the cross, so that it might be better seen. And there the captain indicated where the hole should be made to plant it, and while they were making it, he with all the rest of us went to where the cross was down the river. We brought it from there with the friars and priests going ahead singing in the manner of a procession. There were already some of the natives there, about seventy or eighty, and when they saw us coming, some of them went to place themselves under it in order to help us. We crossed the river along the shore and went to place it where it was to be, which is probably a distance of two cross-bow shots from the river. While we were busy with this there came a good one hundred and fifty or more. After the cross was planted with the arms and device of Your Highness which we first nailed to it, we set up an altar at the foot of it. There the father, Frei Amrique, said Mass, at which those already mentioned

chanted and officiated. There were with us some fifty or sixty natives, all kneeling as we were, and when it came to the Gospel and we all rose to our feet with hands lifted, they rose with us and lifted their hands, remaining thus until it was over. And then they again sat down as we did. And at the elevation of the Host when we knelt, they placed themselves as we were, with hands uplifted, and so quietly that I assure Your Highness that they gave us much edification. They stayed there with us until Communion was over, and after Communion the friars and priests and the captain and some of the rest of us partook of Communion. Some of them, because the sun was hot, arose while we were receiving Communion and others remained as they were and stayed. One of them, a man of fifty or fifty-five years, stayed there with those who remained. While we were all thus he collected those who had remained and even called others. He went about among them and talked to them, pointing with his finger to the altar, and afterwards he lifted his finger towards Heaven as though he were telling them something good, and thus we understood it. After the Mass was over the father took off his outer vestment and remained in his alb, and then he mounted a chair near the altar, and there he preached to us of the Gospel and of the apostles whose day this is, treating at the end of the sermon of this your holy and virtuous undertaking, which edified us still more. Those who still remained for the sermon were looking at him, as we were doing. And the one of whom I speak called some to come there; some came and others departed. And when the sermon was over, Nicolao Coelho brought many tin crosses with crucifixes, which he still had from another voyage, and we thought it well to put one around the neck of each; for which purpose the father, Frei Amrique, seated himself at the foot of the cross, and there, one by one, he put around the neck of each his own cross tied to a string, first making him kiss it and raise his hands. Many came for this, and we did likewise to all. They must have been about forty or fifty. And after this was finished it was already a good hour after midday; we went to the ships to eat, and the captain took with him that same one who had pointed out to the others the altar and the sky, and his brother with him, to whom he did much honour. And he gave him a Moorish shirt, and to the other one a shirt such as the rest of us wore. And as it appears to me and to every one, these people in order to be wholly Christian lack nothing except to understand us, for whatever they saw us do, they did likewise; wherefore it appeared to all that they have no idolatry and no worship. And I well believe that if Your Highness should send here someone who would go about more at leisure among them, all will be turned to the desire of Your Highness. And if someone should come for this purpose, a priest should not fail to come also at once to baptize them, for by that time they will already have a greater knowledge of our faith through the two convicts who are remaining here among them. Both of these also partook of Communion to-day. Among all those who came to-day there was only one young woman who stayed continuously at the Mass, and she was given a cloth with which to cover herself, and we put it about her; but as she sat down she did not think to spread it much to cover herself. Thus, Senhor, the innocence of this people is such, that that of Adam could not have been greater in respect to shame. Now Your Highness may see whether people who live in such innocence will be converted or not if they are

taught what pertains to their salvation. When this was over we went thus in their presence to kiss the cross, took leave of them, and came to eat.

I believe, Senhor, that with these two convicts who remain here, there stay also two seamen who to-night left this ship, fleeing to shore in a skiff. They have not come back and we believe that they remain here, because to-morrow, God willing, we take our departure from here.

It seems to me, Senhor, that this land from the promontory we see farthest south to another promontory which is to the north, of which we caught sight from this harbour, is so great that it will have some twenty or twenty-five leagues of coastline. Along the shore in some places it has great banks, some of them red, some white, and the land above is quite flat and covered with great forests. From point to point the entire shore is very flat and very beautiful. As for the interior, it appeared to us from the sea very large, for, as far as [the] eye could reach, we could see only land and forests, a land which seemed extensive to us. Up to now we are unable to learn that there is gold or silver in it, or anything of metal or iron; nor have we seen any, but the land itself has a very good climate, as cold and temperate as that of Entre Doiro e Minho, because in the present season we found it like that. Its waters are quite endless. So pleasing is it that if one cares to profit by it, everything will grow in it because of its waters. But the best profit which can be derived from it, it seems to me, will be to save this people, and this should be the chief seed which Your Highness should sow there. And if there were nothing more than to have here a stopping-place for this voyage to Calicut, that would suffice, to say nothing of an opportunity to fulfill and do that which Your Highness so much desires, namely, the increase of our Holy Faith.

And in this manner, Senhor, I give here to Your Highness an account of what I saw in this land of yours, and if I have been somewhat lengthy you will pardon me, for the desire I had to tell you everything made me set it down thus in detail. And, Senhor, since it is certain that in this charge laid upon me as in any other thing which may be for your service, Your Highness will be very faithfully served by me, I ask of you that in order to do me a special favor you order my son-in-law, Jorge do Soiro, to return from the island of Sam Thomé. This I shall take as a very great favor to me.

I kiss Your Highness's hands.

From this Porto Seguro of your island of Vera Cruz to-day, Friday, the first day of May of 1500.

Pero Vaaz de Caminha

[Superscribed]

To the King Our Lord

[On the back in a contemporary hand] Letter of Pero Vaaz de Caminha concerning the discovery of the new land which Pedro Alvarez made.