

It is of note that all these island territories began to go to the dogs once news arrived of the death of our most gracious Queen Isabella, who departed this life in 1504. Up to then, only a small number of provinces had been destroyed through unjust military action, not the whole area, and news of even this partial destruction had by and large been kept from the queen, because, she—may her soul rest in peace—took a close personal interest in the physical and spiritual welfare of the native peoples, as those of us who lived through those years and saw examples of it with our own eyes can attest. There is one other general rule in all this, and it is that, wherever the Spaniards set foot, right throughout the Americas, they subjected the native inhabitants to the cruelties of which we have spoken, killing these poor and innocent people, tyrannizing them, and oppressing them in the most abominable fashion. The longer they spent in the region the more ingenious were the torments, each crueler than the last, that they inflicted on their victims, as God finally abandoned them and left them to plummet headlong into a life of full-time crime and wickedness.

JEAN DE LÉRY

Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, his account of a year among the Tupinamba Indians, is a marvel of early modern ethnography, with unprecedented detail presented in a remarkably sympathetic tone. Léry's life (1534–1613) was shaped by the violent conflicts over religion that swept across Europe and divided France, and his narrative connects the experience of the New World with the upheavals of the Reformation. In 1554, Léry sailed on the first Protestant mission to the New World, landing where Rio de Janeiro stands today. Both the French and the Portuguese, who had established an earlier claim to Brazil, interacted with the Tupinamba Indians of the coast, but the French seem to have maintained friendlier relations with them as traders and guests. Some even moved into their villages and adopted their ways, becoming invaluable liaisons for the missionaries.

Upon his return to France, Léry found a nation torn apart by religious differences. Partly because of the violence of the times, his account of Brazil was not written until years later, after he had experienced the persecution of Huguenots amid scenes of unimaginable cruelty. The violence that Léry witnessed among his compatriots profoundly marked his sense of what constituted savagery and civilization, and gave his subsequent description of the Tupinamba a strikingly detached, even-handed tone. Léry watches closely, reports in detail, yet recognizes the limits of his own knowledge. He acknowledges his interpreter—perhaps one of the Frenchmen who had gone to live with the Tupinamba—and shows the reader how experience changes his initial impressions. This constant recalibration, as Léry keeps himself and his reader from jumping to conclusions, makes

History of a Voyage a fascinating example of the skeptical relativism that reaches its greatest incarnation in Montaigne's

Essays. Montaigne's famous "Of Cannibals" was based in part on his reading of Léry.

From History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil¹

Law and Civil Order among the Savages

As for the civil order of our savages, it is an incredible thing—a thing that cannot be said without shame to those who have both divine and human laws—how a people guided solely by their nature, even corrupted as it is, can live and deal with each other in such peace and tranquillity. (I mean, however, each nation within itself, or among allied nations: as for enemies, you have seen in another chapter how harshly they are treated.) Nevertheless, if it happens that some of them quarrel (which occurs so rarely that during almost a year I was with them I only saw them fight with each other twice), by no means do the others try to separate them or make peace; on the contrary, even when the adversaries are on the point of putting each others' eyes out, they let them go ahead without saying a word to prevent them. However, if anyone is wounded by his neighbor, and if he who struck the blow is apprehended, he will receive a similar blow in the same part of his body by the kinsmen of the one injured. If the wounds of the latter prove to be mortal, or if he is killed on the spot, the relatives of the dead man will take the life of the killer in the same way. In short, it is a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and so forth; but as I have said, this is very rarely seen among them.

The real property of this people consists of houses and of many more excellent pieces of land than they need for their subsistence. In a given village of five or six hundred people, while several families may live in the same house, nevertheless each has its own place, and the husband keeps his wife and children separate; however, there is nothing to keep you from seeing down the full length of these buildings, which are usually more than sixty feet long.

It is a curious fact worth noting that the Brazilians, who usually stay only five or six months in a place, carry with them the big pieces of wood and tall *pindo* plants, with which their houses are made and covered; thus they often move their very villages from place to place. These, however, still retain their former names, so that we have sometimes found villages at a quarter- or half-league's distance from the location where we had visited them before. Their dwellings being so easily transported, you can imagine that they have no great palaces (such as those attributed to the Peruvian Indians, whose wooden houses are so well built that there are rooms one hundred fifty feet long and eighty feet wide); and no one of the Tupinamba nation ever begins a dwelling or any other building that he will not see built and rebuilt twenty times in his life, if he lives to the age of manhood. If you ask them why they move their

1. Translated by Janet Whatley.

household so often, they simply answer that the change of air keeps them healthier, and that if they did other than what their grandfathers did, they would die immediately.

* * *

Although the Tupinamba receive very humanely the friendly strangers who go to visit them, nevertheless the Frenchmen and others from over here who do not understand their language find themselves at first marvelously disconcerted in their midst. The first time that I myself frequented them was three weeks after we arrived at Villegagnon's island,² when an interpreter took me along to four or five villages on the mainland. The first one—called *Yabouraci* in the native language and "Pepin" by the French (because of a ship that loaded there once, whose master had that name)—was only two leagues from our fort. When we arrived there, I immediately found myself surrounded by savages, who were asking me "*Marapé-derere, marapé derere?*" meaning "What is your name? What is your name?" (which at that time I understood no better than High German). One of them took my hat, which he put on his head; another my sword and my belt, which he put around his naked body; yet another my tunic, which he donned. Deafening me with their yells, they ran through the village with my clothing. Not only did I think that I had lost everything, but I didn't know what would become of me. As experience has shown me several times since, that was only from ignorance of their way of doing things; for they do the same thing to everyone who visits them, and especially those they haven't seen before. After they have played around a little with one's belongings, they carry them all back and return them to their owners.

The interpreter had warned me that they wanted above all to know my name; but if I had said to them Pierre, Guillaume, or Jean, they would have been able neither to retain it nor to pronounce it (in fact, instead of saying "Jean," they would say "Nian"). So I had to accommodate by naming something that was known to them. Since by a lucky chance my surname, "Léry," means "oyster" in their language, I told them that my name was "*Léry-oussou*," that is, a big oyster. This pleased them greatly; with their "*Teh!*" of admiration, they began to laugh, and said, "That is a fine name; we have not yet seen any *Mair* (that is, a Frenchman) of that name." And indeed, I can say with assurance that never did Circe metamorphose a man into such a fine oyster, nor into one who could converse so well with Ulysses, as since then I have been able to do with our savages.³

One must note that their memory is so good that as soon as someone has told them his name, if they were to go a hundred years (so to speak) without seeing him, they will never forget it. Presently I will tell about the other ceremonies they observe when they receive friends who go to see them.

But for the moment I will continue to recount some of the noteworthy things that happened to me during my first journey among the Tupinamba. That same day the interpreter and I were going on to spend the night in another village called *Euramiri* (the French call it "Goset," because of an interpreter of that

2. An island in the mouth of Guanabara Bay, in what is today Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, named after the French explorer who led Léry's expedition.

3. In the *Odyssey*, the sorceress Circe transformed Odysseus's men into animals. "Ulysses": the Latin name for Odysseus.

name who stayed there). Arriving at sunset, we found the savages dancing and finishing up the *cannin* of a prisoner whom they had killed only six hours earlier, the pieces of whom we saw on the *boucan*.⁴ Do not ask whether, with this beginning, I was astonished to see such a tragedy; however, as you will hear, that was nothing compared to the fright that I had soon after.

We had entered one of the village houses, where each of us sat, according to custom, in a cotton bed hung in the air. After the women had wept (in a manner that I will describe in a moment) and the old man, the master of the house, had made his speech of welcome, the interpreter—who was not new to the customs of the savages, and who, moreover, liked to drink and *canniner*⁵ as much as they did—without saying a single word to me, nor warning me of anything, went over to the big crowd of dancers and left me there with some of the savages. So after eating a little root flour and other food they had offered us, I, weary and asking only for rest, lay down in the cotton bed I had been sitting on.

Not only was I kept awake by the noise that the savages made, dancing and whistling all night while eating their prisoner; but, what is more, one of them approached me with the victim's foot in hand, cooked and *boucané*, asking me (as I learned later, for I didn't understand at the time) if I wanted to eat some of it. His countenance filled me with such terror that you need hardly ask if I lost all desire to sleep. Indeed, I thought that by brandishing the human flesh he was eating, he was threatening me and wanted to make me understand that I was about to be similarly dealt with. As one doubt begets another, I suspected straight away that the interpreter, deliberately betraying me, had abandoned me and delivered me into the hands of these barbarians. If I had seen some exit through which to flee, I would not have hesitated. But seeing myself surrounded on all sides by those whose intentions I failed to understand (for as you will hear, they had not the slightest thought of doing me harm), I firmly expected shortly to be eaten, and all that night I called on God in my heart. I will leave it to those who understand what I am saying, and who put themselves in my place, to consider whether that night seemed long.

At daybreak my interpreter (who had been off carousing with those rascals of savages all night long in other village houses) came to find me. Seeing me, as he said, not only ashen-faced and haggard but also feverish, he asked me whether I was sick, or if I hadn't rested well. Distraught, I answered wrathfully that they had well and truly kept me from sleeping, and that he was a scoundrel to have left me among these people whom I couldn't understand at all: still as anxious as ever, I urged that we get ourselves out of there with all possible speed. Thereupon he told me that I should have no fear, and that it wasn't us they were after. When he recounted the whole business to the savages—who, rejoicing at my coming, and thinking to show me affection, had not budged from my side all night—they said that they had sensed that I had been somewhat frightened of them, for which they were very sorry. My one consolation was the hoot of laughter they sent up—for they are great jesters—at having (without meaning to) given me such a scare.

* * *

4. A grill. Léry explains elsewhere that *cannin* is an alcoholic drink brewed from a grain called

amati, here, by extension a feast.
5. To carouse.

Now to return to the treatment the savages offer visitors. After the guests have drunk and eaten, in the way I have described, and rested or slept in their houses, if they are courteous, they ordinarily present knives to men, or scissors, or tweezers for plucking out beards; to the women, combs and mirrors; and to the little boys, fishhooks. If beyond that there are dealings about food supplies or other things that they have, you ask what they want for it, and upon giving them whatever is agreed upon, you can carry it off and go on your way.

Since, as I have said elsewhere, there are no horses, donkeys, or other beasts of burden in their country, they simply travel on their own two feet. If the foreign visitors are weary, they have only to present a knife or some other object to the savages; the latter, prompt as they are to please their friends, will offer to carry them. In fact, while I was over there, there were those who put us on their shoulders, with their heads between our thighs and our legs hanging against their bellies, and carried us that way more than a league without resting. Sometimes, to give them some relief, we told them to stop; laughing at us, they would say in their language: "What? Do you think we are women, or so slack and weak of heart that we might faint under the burden?" "I would carry you a whole day without stopping for rest," said one of them who had me around his neck. We, for our part, would roar with laughter at these two-footed mounts, applauding them and cheering them on, and saying, "Well then! Let's keep going!"

As for their natural fellow-feeling, every day they distribute and present each to each the venison, fish, fruit, and the other good things of their country, and not only would a savage die of shame (so to speak) if he saw his neighbor lacking what he has in his power to give, but also, as I have experienced it, they practice the same liberality toward foreigners who are their allies. As an example of this I will recount the time when, as I mentioned in Chapter X, two Frenchmen and I had lost our way in the woods—when we thought we were going to be eaten by a huge and terrifying lizard—and moreover, during the space of two days and a night that we were lost, suffered greatly from hunger. When we finally found ourselves in a village called *Pauo*, where we had been on other occasions, we could not have received a better welcome than we had from the savages of that place. To begin with, when they heard us recount the troubles we had endured, and the danger we had been in—not only of being devoured by cruel beasts, but also of being seized and eaten by the *Margaia*, our enemy and theirs, whose land we had unintentionally approached—and when they saw the state we were in, all scratched up by the thorns that we had gone through in the wilderness, they took such pity on us that I can't help saying that the hypocritical welcomes of those over here who use only slippery speech for consolation of the afflicted is a far cry from the humanity of these people, whom nonetheless we call "barbarians."

INCA GARCILASO DE LA VEGA

Born in the city of Cuzco, in present-day Peru, to a prominent Spanish conquistador and an Inca princess, the young *mestizo* Gómez Suárez de Figueroa (1539–1616) traveled to Spain as a young man. Fashioning himself as a man of letters, he took on a new name that combined his indigenous expertise on the New World with the authority of Spanish literary forebears (his distant relative Garcilaso de la Vega was the Petrarchan poet whose sonnets appear in this anthology), hence the *Inca Garcilaso*. His most famous work, the *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* (1609) describes their world before the arrival of the Spaniards, including the expansion of the Inca Empire, while the *General History of Peru* (published posthumously in 1617) narrates the Spanish conquest of Peru and its aftermath. By the time Garcilaso wrote

these massive works, the Spaniards had written countless histories of the conquest. Acutely aware of the prejudice and even surprise with which European readers might respond to a *mestizo* writer going over the same ground, Garcilaso astutely establishes his own authority, explaining with a mixture of tact and pride how his intimate knowledge of Inca culture allows him to correct the misunderstandings that plague Spanish accounts. The very name Peru, he explains, comes from one such misunderstanding. Garcilaso admires the Inca Empire, comparing it both to Rome and to the Spaniards, thus suggesting that the problem is not so much empire itself but its mismanagement. He takes pride in his *mestizo* identity, and describes the tremendous mixing of peoples that ensued from the New World encounter.

*From Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru*¹

Preface

Though there have been learned Spaniards who have written accounts of the states of the New World, such as those of Mexico and Peru and the other kingdoms of the heathens, they have not described these realms so fully as they might have done. This I have remarked particularly in what I have seen written about Peru, concerning which, as a native of the city of Cuzco, which was formerly the Rome of that empire² I have fuller and more accurate information than that provided by previous writers. It is true that these have dealt with many of the very remarkable achievements of that empire, but they have set them down so briefly that, owing to the manner in which they are told, I am scarcely able to understand even such matters as are well known to me. For this reason, impelled by my natural love for my native country, I have

1. Translated by Harold V. Livermore.

2. I.e., the capital city of the Inca Empire.

CHAPTER 31

New names for various racial groups.

We were forgetting the best imports into the Indies, namely the Spaniards, and the Negroes who have since been taken there as slaves, for they were previously unknown in my country. These two races have mingled [with the Indians] in various ways to form others which are distinguished by the use of different names. Although I spoke a little about this in the *History of Florida*, I have decided to repeat it here, as being the proper place. Thus any Spanish man or woman who arrives from Spain is called a Spaniard or Castilian, the two words being quite interchangeable in Peru; and I have used them indifferently in this history and in the *Florida*. The children of Spaniards by Spanish women born there are called *criollos* or *criollas*, implying that they were born in the Indies. The name was invented by the Negroes, as its use shows. They use it to mean a Negro born in the Indies, and they devised it to distinguish those who come from this side and were born in Guinea from those born in the New World, since the former are held in greater honor and considered to be of higher rank because they were born in their own country, while their children were born in a strange land. The parents take offence if they are called *criollos*. The Spaniards have copied them by introducing this word to describe those born in the New World, and in this way both Spaniards and Guinea Negroes are called *criollos* if they are born in the New World. The Negro who arrives there from the Old World is called Negro or Guineo. The child of a Negro by an Indian woman or of an Indian and a Negro woman is called *mulato* or *mulata*. Their children are called *cholos*, a word from the Windward Islands: it means a dog, but is not used for a thoroughbred dog, but only for a mongrel cur: the Spaniards use the word in a pejorative and vituperative sense. The children of Spaniards by Indians are called *mestizos*, meaning that we are a mixture of the two races. The word was applied by the first Spaniards who had children by Indian women, and because it was used by our fathers, as well as on account of its meaning, I call myself by it in public and am proud of it, though in the Indies, if a person is told: "You're a *mestizo*," or "He's a *mestizo*," it is taken as an insult. This is the reason why they have adopted with such enthusiasm the name *montañés* which some potentate applied to them, among other slights and insults, instead of the word *mestizo*. They do not stop to consider that, although in Spain the word *montañés* is an honorable appellation, on account of the privileges that have been bestowed on the natives of the Asturian and Basque mountains,¹ if it is applied to anyone who is not from these parts, it assumes a pejorative sense derived from its original meaning "something from the mountains." This is brought out by our great master Antonio de Lebrija,² to whom all good Latinists in Spain today are indebted, in his vocabulary. In the general language of Peru the word for a mountaineer is *sacharuna*, properly "savage," and whoever applied the word *montañés* was privately calling them savages: those of my own generation, not understanding

1. People from these regions claimed that their Christianity went back further than anyone else's in Spain, as they had not been conquered in the Muslim invasions.

2. Antonio de Lebrija (or Nebrija) (1441-1552), Spanish humanist who in 1492 produced the first European grammar for a modern language, the *Gramática de la lengua castellana*.

this malicious implication, took pride in the insulting epithet, when they should rather have avoided and abominated it, using the name our fathers bestowed on us rather than accepting new-fangled indignities.

The children of a Spaniard and a mestizo, or vice versa, are called *cuatralvos*, meaning they have one part of Indian blood and three of Spanish. The children of a mestizo and an Indian, or vice versa, are called *tresalvos*, meaning that they have three parts of Indian blood and one of Spanish. All these names, and others which we omit to avoid tedium, have been devised in Peru to describe the racial groups that have come into existence since the arrival of the Spaniards, and we can therefore say that they were brought in together with the other things not previously found in Peru. With this we return to the Inca kings, the children of the great Huaina Cápac,³ who are calling us to relate great events that occurred in their time.

3. Inca ruler who died in 1525, shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards.

GUAMAN POMA DE AYALA

Poma (ca. 1535–ca. 1616) was an indigenous Peruvian born soon after Francisco Pizarro conquered Peru. Educated and converted to Christianity by the Spaniards, Poma was an *indio ladino*, or Spanish-speaking Indian. He also spoke at least two indigenous languages: *quechua* and *aymara*, and had apparently traveled widely across Peru. In the early years of the seventeenth century, Poma wrote an impassioned nine-hundred-page letter to the king of Spain, now known as *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*, to alert him to the abuses he saw in the colonial administration around him, complete with recommendations for improvement. Almost four hundred illustrations accompany the text, registering an indigenous perspective and eloquently making visible Poma's case to the king. The *New Chronicle* relates

Peruvian history from a new perspective, while *Good Government* lays out the author's recommendations, including the wishful suggestion that an indigenous viceroy—Poma generously volunteers his son—should rule Peru for the king of Spain.

Poma's massive letter apparently never reached its destination, and was instead collected in a Danish archive as proof of Spanish excesses in the New World. It was not until 1908 that it was rediscovered and its immense importance as *auto-ethnography* (a description of a culture by one of its own members) recognized. Poma provides a wealth of information on colonial Peru, yet his text is much more a polemic than a description. He strongly condemns *mestizaje*—unions between Spaniards and Indians—claiming that it will gradually lead to the disappearance of his

PERO VAZ DE CAMINHA

Vaz de Caminha (ca. 1468–ca. 1520) was a captain on the first Portuguese expedition to reach present-day Brazil, and his account is the first report of its land and people, a vibrant description of an almost unimaginably verdant landscape. Vaz de Caminha provides far more detail on the first encounter with the indigenous population than Columbus does in his report, turning from idealization to derision and back again. He praises the Indians' innocence, yet reads their inevitable suspicion of the newcomers as a sign that they are too primitive, too much like animals, to engage with them. The brief convivial interlude in which Indians and Portuguese share a dance ends abruptly when the Indians flee, Vaz de Caminha tells us, "like spar-

rows at a feeding-place." This ambivalence about how to categorize the Indians would haunt the Iberian colonizers, as scholars, churchmen, and government officials debated the extent of their humanity and their capacity for reason, which had serious implications for the legitimacy of the conquest and the exploitation of indigenous labor. Although Vaz de Caminha's vision of Europeans intermingled with the indigenous population has often been romanticized as an early harbinger of a Brazilian melting-pot, or as a sign that the Portuguese Empire was less violent than the Spanish, his letter reveals much of the same ambivalence and calculation as Columbus's account, even as it observes the New World from a less distanced perspective.

From Letter to King Manuel¹

* * *

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 *almadix*.² 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 angry 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

1. Translated by William Brooks Greenlee.

2. A bark canoe.

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,³ 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 skittish like wild animals 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 Bartolomeu 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 Alfonso Ribeiro⁴ 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.⁵ And thus we returned to the ships to sleep when it was already almost night.

3. City northeast of Lisbon, in Portugal. "Diogo Dias": brother of Bartolomeu Dias, and commander of one of the caravels on the expedition.

4. A young convict who was a servant on the expedition.

5. Northernmost province of Portugal and Caminho's homeland.