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Citation: Vaz de Caminha, Pedro. "The Discovery of Brazil: Letter of Pedro Vaz de Caminha, written in Pôrto-Seguro of Vera Cruz on the First Day of May in the Year 1500," in *Portuguese Voyages, 1498-1663*, edited by Charles David Ley. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1947, pp. 41-59.

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PORTUGUESE VOYAGES

1498—1663



EDITED BY
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J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.
Aldine House Bedford St. London
First published 1947

THE DISCOVERY OF BRAZIL

Letter of Pedro Vaz de Caminha, written in Pôrto-Seguro of Vera Cruz on the First Day of May in the Year 1500.

SIRE,

The admiral of this fleet, besides the other captains, will write to Your Majesty telling you the news of the finding of this new territory of Your Majesty's which has just been discovered on this voyage. But I, too, cannot but give my account of this matter to Your Majesty, as well as I can, though I know that my powers of telling and relating it are less than any man's.¹ May it please Your Majesty, however, to let my good faith serve as an excuse for my ignorance, and to rest assured that I shall not set down anything beyond what I have seen and reflected on, either to add beauty or ugliness to the narrative. I shall not give any account of the crew or the ship's course, since that is the pilot's concern, and I should not know how to do so. Therefore, Sire, I begin what I have to tell thus:

And I say that our departure from Belém was, as Your Majesty knows, on Monday, 9th March. On Saturday, the 14th of the same month, between eight and nine o'clock we sailed between the Canary Islands,² going in nearest to the Grand Canary. We were becalmed in sight of them the whole day, for some three or four leagues. On Sunday the 22nd of the same month, at about ten o'clock, we came in sight of the Cape Verde Islands,³ or, to be precise, St. Nicholas's Island, as the pilot, Pero Escobar,⁴ declared.

On the following night, the Monday, we discovered at dawn that Vasca de Ataíde and his ship had been lost, though there was no strong or contrary wind to account for this.⁵ The admiral sought him diligently in all directions, but he did not appear again. So we continued on our way across the ocean until on the Tuesday of Easter week, which was 21st April, we came across some signs of being near land, at some 660 or 670 leagues from the aforesaid

¹ One should not forget that this is modesty and that Caminha was a highly trained professional scribe.

² Recently colonized by the Spanish.

³ Recently colonized by the Portuguese.

⁴ Pilot of the *Berrio* on da Gama's expedition.

⁵ He later rejoined them.

island, by the pilot's computation. These signs were a great quantity of those long seaweeds sailors call *botelho*, as well as others to which they give the name of 'asses' tails.' On the following morning, Wednesday, we came across the birds they call 'belly-rippers.'

This same day, at the hour of vespers we sighted land, that is to say, first a very high rounded mountain, then other lower ranges of hills to the south of it, and a plain covered with large trees. The admiral named the mountain Easter Mount¹ and the country the Land of the True Cross.

He ordered them to drop the plumb-line, and they measured twenty-five fathoms. At sunset, about six leagues from the shore, we dropped anchor in nineteen fathoms, and it was a good clean anchorage. There we lay all that night. On Thursday morning we set sail and made straight for land, with the smaller ships leading, the water being seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, twelve, ten and nine fathoms deep, until we were half a league from the shore. Here we all cast anchor opposite a river mouth. It must have been more or less ten o'clock when we reached this anchorage.

From there we caught sight of men² walking on the beaches. The small ships which arrived first said that they had seen some seven or eight of them. We let down the longboats and the skiffs. The captains of the other ships came straight to this flagship, where they had speech with the admiral. He sent Nicolau Coelho³ on shore to examine the river.⁴ As soon as the latter began to approach it, men came out on to the beach in groups of twos and threes, so that, when the longboat reached the river mouth, there were eighteen or twenty waiting.

They were dark brown and naked, and had no covering for their private parts, and they carried bows and arrows in their hands. They all came determinedly towards the boat. Nicolau Coelho made a sign to them to put down their bows, and they put them down. But he could not speak to them or make himself understood in any other way because of the waves which were breaking on the shore. He merely threw them a red cap, and a linen bonnet⁵ he had on his head, and a black hat. And one of them threw him a hat of large feathers with a small crown of red and grey feathers, like a parrot's. Another gave him a large bough covered with little white beads which looked like seed-pearls. I believe that

¹ It retains this name, and is one of the highest mountains in the province of Bahia.

² Tupi Indians.

³ See da Gama's voyage.

⁴ The Cai.

⁵ A kind of stocking-cap, with a peak that hangs down and can be moved towards the sun. Portuguese peasants still wear similar caps.

the admiral is sending these articles to Your Majesty. After this, as it was late, the expedition returned to the ships, without succeeding in having further communication with them, because of the sea.

That night there was such a strong south-easterly wind and squalls that it dragged the ships out of their position, more especially the flagship. On Friday morning at about eight o'clock, by the pilot's advice, the captain ordered the anchors to be weighed and the sails hoisted. We went up the coast to the northwards with the longboats and skiffs tied to our sterns, to see if we could find a sheltered spot to anchor in where we could stay to take in water and wood. Not that these were lacking to us, but so as to be provided with everything now, in good time. At the hour when we set sail about sixty or seventy men had gradually come up and were seated near the river. We sailed on, and the admiral told the small ships to run under the shore and to slacken sails if they found a sufficiently protected spot for the ships.

Thus we sailed along the coast, and, ten leagues from the spot where we had weighed anchor, the aforesaid small ships found a ridge of rock which contained a very good, safe port with a very large entrance. So they went in and struck sails. The bigger ships came up behind them, and, a little while after sundown, they struck sails also, perhaps at a league from the rocks, and anchored in eleven fathoms.

Our pilot,¹ Afonso Lopes, was in one of the small ships, and he received orders from the admiral to go in the skiff to take the soundings inside the port, for he was a lively and capable man for the work. He took up two of the men of the country from a canoe.² They were young and well formed and one of them had a bow and six or seven arrows. There were many others on the shore with bows and arrows, but they did not use them. Later, in the evening, he took the two men to the flagship where they were received with great rejoicings and festivities.

They are of a dark brown, rather reddish colour. They have good well-made faces and noses. They go naked, with no sort of covering. They attach no more importance to covering up their private parts or leaving them uncovered than they do to showing their faces. They are very ingenuous in that matter. They both had holes in their lower lips and a bone in them as broad as the knuckles of a hand and as thick as a cotton spindle and sharp at one end like a bodkin.³ They put these bones in from inside the

¹ That is, of the flagship.

² *Almadia*. Alvaro Velho also uses the word, which Ravenstein does not translate.

³ See Alvaro Velho on p. 12 for a similar custom amongst the Africans.

lip ¹ and the part which is placed between the lip and the teeth is made like a rook in chess. They fit them in in such a way that they do not hurt them nor hinder them talking or eating or drinking.

Their hair is straight. They shear their hair,² but leave it a certain length, not cutting it to the roots, though they shave it above the ears. One of them had on a kind of wig covered with yellow feathers which ran round from behind the cavity of the skull, from temple to temple, and so to the back of the head; it must have been about a hand's breadth wide, was very close-set and thick, and covered his occiput and his ears. It was fastened, feather by feather, to his hair with a white paste like wax (but it was not wax), so that the wig was very round and full and regular, and did not need to be specially cleaned when the head was washed, only lifted up.

When they came, the admiral was seated on a chair, with a carpet at his feet instead of a dais. He was finely dressed, with a very big golden collar round his neck. Sancho de Toar,³ Simão de Miranda,⁴ Nicolau Coelho, Aires Correia,⁵ and the rest of us who were in the ship with him were seated on this carpet. Torches were lit. They entered. However, they made no gesture of courtesy or sign of a wish to speak to the admiral or any one else.

For all that, one of them gazed at the admiral's collar and began to point towards the land and then at the collar as if he wished to tell us that there was gold in the country.⁶ And he also looked at a silver candlestick and pointed at the land in the same way, and at the candlestick, as if there was silver there, too. We showed them a grey parrot the admiral had brought with him. They took it in their hands at once and pointed to the land, as if there were others there. We showed them a ram,⁷ but they took no notice of it. We showed them a hen,⁸ and they were almost afraid of it and did not want to take it in their hands; finally they did, but as if alarmed by it. We gave them things to

¹ Their lips were pierced in childhood.

² They did this with sharp stones. Two stones would be used for cutting

³ A Spaniard. Many accounts say he was the first European to visit Sofala, and that he discovered Delagoa Bay on the home voyage. He was captain of a ship.

⁴ Another captain. He accompanied Cabral throughout the voyage. He was afterwards appointed captain of Sofala, where he died in 1512.

⁵ A former shipowner who sold the *Berrio* for da Gama's expedition. He was going to Calicut to take charge of the ill-fated factory there.

⁶ Sugar, coffee, copper, and diamonds are among the chief exports of this part of Brazil to-day. The Tupi Indians knew gold and silver because native traders brought them from the Andes and the south.

⁷ The only sheep native to America were the American big-horns of the Rocky Mountains.

⁸ The various species of 'fowls' are, of course, of oriental origin.

eat: bread, boiled fish, comfits, sweetmeats, cakes, honey, dried figs. They would hardly eat anything of all this, and, if they tasted it, they spat it out at once.¹ We brought them wine² in a cup; they merely sipped it, did not like it at all, and did not want any more of it. We brought them water in a pitcher, and they each took a mouthful, but did not drink it; they just put it in their mouths and spat it out.

One of them saw the white beads of a rosary. He made a sign to be given them and was very pleased with them, and put them round his neck. Then he took them off and put them round his arm, pointing to the land, and again at the beads and at the captain's collar, as if he meant they would give gold for them.

We took it in this sense, because we preferred to. If, however, he was trying to tell us that he would take the beads and the collar as well, we did not choose to understand him, because we were not going to give it to him. Then he returned the beads to the man who had given them to him. Finally they lay on their backs on the carpet to sleep. They did not try to cover up their private parts in any way; these were uncircumcised and had their hairs well shaved and arranged.

The admiral ordered one of his cushions to be put under either of their heads, and the one in the wig took care that this should not be spoiled. They had a cloak spread over them. They consented to this, pulled it over themselves, and slept.

On the Saturday morning the admiral ordered the sails to be hoisted. We approached the entrance, which was very broad, and some six or seven fathoms in depth. All the ships entered it and anchored in five or six fathoms. The anchorage was so good and fine and safe inside that more than two hundred ships and vessels could lie in it. As soon as the ships had taken up their positions and anchored, all the captains came to this flagship. Now the admiral ordered Nicolau Coelho and Bartolomeu Dias to go on shore and take the two men and let them go with their bows and arrows. He also ordered each of them to be given a new shirt, a red bonnet, a rosary of white beads of bone, which they put on their arms, a varvel, and a bell. And he sent with them, to remain there, a banished youth³ of the household of Dom João Telo, named Afonso Ribeiro, who was to stay with them there and learn about their lives and their customs. I, also, was told to accompany Nicolau Coelho.

So we went towards the shore, as straight as an arrow. Nearly

¹ All these foods were strange to them. Probably, also, they suspected poison.

² The local intoxicant was made from the mandioca root.

³ A term of banishment to live a while amongst, and learn about, newly discovered tribes was a well-known form of punishment in Portugal in the days of the discoveries. Some English translators prefer the term 'convict' to 'exile.'

two hundred men came up at once there, all naked, with bows and arrows in their hands. The men we had brought with us made signs to them to retire and to put down their bows. They put them down, but they did not retire very far off. Still, they did put them down, and then those we had brought with us went out to them, and the banished youth as well. Once they had left us, they did not stop. They did not wait one for the other, but rather raced each other. They crossed a very full freshwater river there, wading in up to their thighs. And many others went with them, so that they all ran to some groups of palm-trees on the other side of the river, where more again were waiting. There they stopped. The banished man took part in all this, accompanied by a man who had taken him into his care on the exile's leaving the boat and who went with him to the other side. However, they brought him back to us at once; the two we had brought with us came back with him; they were again naked and were not wearing their bonnets.

After this, many more began to arrive. They walked out into the sea towards the boats till they could go no farther. They brought gourds of water to us, and they took some barrels we had with us, filled them with water, and came back with them to the boats. Not that they got so far as absolutely to board the boats, but they came up near to them, and threw these things in, and we caught them. Then they asked us to give them something.

Nicolau Coelho had brought them varvels and bracelets. To some he gave a varvel and to others a bracelet, so that with that fleshing we nearly won them to our service.¹ They gave us some of their bows and arrows in exchange for hats and linen bonnets and for anything we were willing to give them.

The two youths went away and we did not see them again.

Many of the men who were there—practically the greater part of them—had those sticks of bone in their lips. Some of them had their lips pierced and wore wooden pegs in the rifts which looked like the stoppers of wineskins.² Others, again, wore three sticks, one in the middle and one at each side. Others were covered with a motley paint, that is to say, half of them was their own colour and half was covered with a black, slightly bluish paint.³ Others were painted in quarters.

There were three or four girls among them. These were very young and pretty, and had abundant long black hair down their

¹ A metaphor from falconry. Most of the objects given to the Tupis seem to have been originally intended for falconry.

² Little wooden stoppers which screw on, about as long as an ordinary nail, but thicker. Wineskins are still used in country districts in Portugal and—very extensively—in Spain.

³ These 'paints' were the stains from berries and nuts.

backs. Their private parts were tightly knit, well raised, and half free from hairs; thus we were not at all ashamed to look at them.

It was not possible to speak to these people or understand them. There was such a chattering in uncouth speech that no one could be heard or understood. We made signs to them to go away. They did so, and went across the river. Then three or four of our men left the boats and filled I do not know how many water barrels we had brought with us, and so we returned. When they saw us going they made signs to us to come back. We went back, and they sent us the exile, for they did not wish him to remain there with them. He had had a small basin with him and two or three red bonnets, which were to be given to their lord, if they had one. They did not attempt to take anything from him, but sent him back with it all. However, Bartolomeu Dias told him to return and give them, in our sight, to the man who had first taken him into his care. After which he joined us again and we took him back with us.

The man who had taken him into his care was elderly, and he had feathers stuck all over his body as finery, so that he seemed covered with arrows like Saint Sebastian. Others had head-dresses of yellow feathers, or of red, or of green. One of the girls was all dyed from top to toe with that paint of theirs, and she certainly was so well made and so rounded, and her private parts (of which she made no privacy) so comely that many women in our country would be ashamed, if they saw such perfection, that theirs were not equally perfect. None of the men was circumcised, but all just as we are.

After these events we returned and they went away. In the afternoon the admiral went in his longboat and the other captains in theirs, to take their ease round the bay near the beach. Nobody went on shore, because the admiral did not wish to go, in spite of there being nobody there. He only left the boat, as we all did, on a big island there is in the bay, which runs a long way out at low tide. But the island is surrounded by water on every side, so that none can go there except by boat or swimming. There he and all of us took our ease for a good hour and a half. And some sailors had brought a net, and fished; they killed some small fish, but not many. At last we returned to the ships well after nightfall.

On the morning of Low Sunday the admiral decided to go to hear Mass and a sermon on that island. He commanded all the captains to take their places in the boats and come with him—which they did. He ordered a pavilion to be set up on the island and in it a finely adorned altar. Then he had Mass said in the presence of all of us. It was chanted by Friar Henrique and the responses were chanted by the other fathers and priests, who were

all present. In my opinion every one heard the Mass with great joy and devoutness. The admiral stood on the Gospel side with the banner of the Order of the Knights of Christ,¹ with which he had left Belém,² uplifted before him.

When the Mass was finished, the priest removed his vestments and mounted a tall chair and we all cast ourselves down on the sands. He preached a solemn and edifying sermon on the Gospel. Finally he spoke of our coming hither and finding this land, as befitting to the Cross of the Knights of Christ in the service of which we were voyaging. This last observation was very timely, and increased our devotion.

At the time at which we were hearing the Mass and the sermon, there were more or less the same number of people on the beach as the day before. They had their bows and arrows and they were taking their ease. First they sat looking at us; but when the Mass was over, and while we were seated listening to the sermon, many of them got up and played on horns or shells and began to leap and dance, for a short while. Some of them got into two or three canoes they had there, which were not like those I had seen; they were merely three beams tied together.³ Four, or five, or as many as wished got into them, but they hardly moved off any distance from the land, only as far out as they could have waded.

After the sermon the admiral and all of us made our way towards the boats, with our banner uplifted. We embarked and all made towards the shore so as to pass along by where those people were. By the admiral's orders, Bartolomeu Dias went first in his skiff, to give them back a board from one of their canoes which the sea had borne away from them. We all followed him at a stone's throw. When they saw Bartolomeu Dias's skiff they all came down to the water's brink and walked as far out as they could. He made a sign to them to put down their bows. Many of them went and put them down on the ground immediately, but others did not put them down.

There was one of them there who was always telling the others to keep away. Not that it seemed to me that they had any respect or fear for him.⁴ This man who was keeping them away had his bows and arrows with him. He was dyed with red paint on chest, back, hips, thighs, and all down his legs, but his hypochondries,

¹ An Order like the Templars, founded in 1319. Nearly all the Portuguese discoverers belonged to this Order.

² They had had a ceremonial departure from Belém, like Vasco da Gama's fleet.

³ These were approximately six feet in length and two feet in width, and bound together by sprigs. Paddles were used.

⁴ He was probably an 'elder of the people,' but, even so, the idea of leadership was very little known amongst the Tupis, whose communities lived in a rough kind of equality and co-operation.

belly, and stomach were of his own colour. The paint was so red that the water did not eat into it nor wash it away. Rather was he redder than before when he left the water. One of our men left Bartolomeu Dias's skiff and went in among them, but they did not interfere with him, much less did they think of hurting him. Indeed, they gave him gourds of water, and made signs to those in the skiff to come on shore. So Bartolomeu Dias turned his course back towards the admiral. We went to our ships to eat, playing trumpets and bagpipes, and not troubling them further. They sat down on the beach again, and remained there for the time being.

The sea runs out a very long way at low tide on the island where we went to hear Mass and a sermon, and leaves a large expanse of sand and pebbles uncovered. When we were there some men had gone to look for shell-fish, but had not found any. They had, however, found some short thick prawns, one of which was so large and thick, however, that I can say I never saw such a big one. They had also found some cockle and mussel shells but none in a complete state.

Immediately we had eaten, all the captains came to our flagship by the admiral's orders. He took them aside, and I went with them. He asked us all if it seemed advisable to us to send the supply ship to Your Majesty, with the news of the discovery, so that this place might be better explored and known than we could know it, for we should have to continue our journey. Many opinions were given on the matter, but every one, or the majority, agreed in saying that the plan was excellent. On this resolution being taken, the admiral asked if it would then be advisable to take a pair of those men by force so as to send them to Your Majesty, and leave two of the exiles in their places. But they agreed that it was not necessary to take men by force, since those taken anywhere by force usually say of everything that they are asked about that they have it in their country. If we left two of the exiles there, they would give better, very much better information than those men would if we took them; for nobody can understand them, nor would it be a speedy matter for them to learn to speak well enough to be able to tell us nearly so much about that country as the exiles will when Your Majesty sends to them here. Therefore let us not think of taking any one away from here by force, nor of causing scandal. Rather let us conciliate and pacify them and merely leave the two exiles here when we go. All agreed to this, as it seemed the best course.

When we had finished, the admiral said we would go on shore from the boats. Then we could see what the river was like, and also we could take our ease. We all went armed on shore from the boats, taking the banner with us. They were there on the beach at the river mouth, towards which we were going; and before

we arrived they had put down all their bows, as we had taught them to do, and signed to us to land. But, as soon as our prows ran aground, they immediately fled on to the other side of the river, which is no broader than a skittle alley. Immediately we had disembarked some of our men crossed the river¹ and went in amongst them. Some of them waited there, others moved away. In any case, the fact of the matter was that both our people and theirs moved about in a single group. They gave away their bows and arrows for hats and linen caps and whatever else we could give them. So many of our men crossed the river and went in amongst them that they sheered off and moved away. Some went inland to where there were others. The admiral made two men carry him on their shoulders across the river and called every one back. There were not more people than usual on the other side. But when they saw the admiral calling up every one around him, those who were there came up with our people. It was not because they recognized him as the Master (indeed, it would seem that they neither understand nor conceive what this means), but because many of our people, had by then crossed over on to the side of the river. They spoke to us there and brought us several bows, and beads like the ones I have spoken of. These they exchanged for anything, so that our men took many bows, arrows, and beads back to the ship.

Then the admiral returned to the original bank of the river. Many at once flocked up to him. There you could see gallants painted red, or black, or in quarters, both on body and legs; they really looked well so. There were five or six women, too, among them. They were young, and their appearance was not bad, naked like that. One of them had a thigh painted with that black paint, from her knee to her hip and her buttocks, and otherwise she was of her natural colour. Another was painted round the backs of her knees and on the palms of her feet; her private parts were all naked and ingenuously uncovered, and there was no immodesty at all in this. There was also a young woman there carrying a child at her breast tied up in a cloth (of what material, I do not know) so that nothing could be seen of it but its little legs. But there was no cloth over the legs and the rest of its mother.

Next the admiral went along up the river which ran beside the shore. He waited there for an old man who came up carrying a canoe paddle. He went on speaking to us as long as the admiral was there. However, nobody ever understood him, nor did he us, in spite of all we asked him about gold; for we wished to know if there was any in that land. The old man's lip was so deeply pierced that a thick thumb could have been put into the hole. He wore a valueless green stone in the cleft, which closed it on

¹ The Mutari.

the outside. The admiral ordered it to be taken out. The man said the devil knows what, and tried to put it in the admiral's mouth. We laughed a little and jested about that, but the admiral was displeased and left him. One of our men gave him an old hat for the stone; not that it was worth anything, but just as something to show. Afterwards the admiral had it, I believe, to send to Your Majesty with the other things.

We went along to see the river, the water of which was good and plentiful. There are a few not very high palms along it with very good dates in them. We gathered and ate many. Then the admiral turned back to the river mouth where we had disembarked.

On the other bank of the river a number of them were dancing¹ and making merry, opposite each other, but without touching hands—which they did very well. Diogo Dias,² who was an exciseman in Sacavém before, an amusing pleasure-loving fellow, went over on to the other bank of the river, taking with him one of our bagpipe³ players with his bagpipe. He began dancing with them, taking them by the hand. They laughed and were pleased and danced very well with him to the sound of the bagpipe. After dancing he showed them many kinds of light turns on the ground, and a somersault; they laughed, it surprised them and pleased them. Yet, though he held their attention and diverted them in that way, they soon took fright as wild things from the hills do, and went away inland.

So the admiral and all of us crossed the river and went along the beach whilst the boats went along in near the land. We reached a big freshwater lake which is near the beach. All that coast is marshy inland and there is water in many places there. After we had crossed the river, seven or eight of them went in among the sailors returning to the boats. They took a shark Bartolomeu Dias had killed off with them—took it up, and threw it down on the beach.⁴

As may be seen, whenever up to now they seemed partly tamed, in the passing of them from one hand to the other they fled away like birds from a net. One does not dare raise one's voice to them for fear they may sheer off even more.⁵ And yet we do everything that they wish, in order to tame them.

¹ The Tupi dances were usually accompanied by instruments and singing.

² Brother of Bartolomeu Dias. Clerk of the *São Gabriel* on da Gama's voyage. He was one of the two left on shore at Pandarini. He was intended as factor at Calicut, but the Indians imprisoned him; though, soon after, they released him and he returned to Portugal.

On Cabral's voyage he was captain of a caravel. He was driven out of his course whilst returning and accidentally discovered Madagascar. He returned to Lisbon on 27th July 1501.

³ A form of bagpipe (*gaita*) is found all over northern Portugal and in northern Spain.

⁴ They were themselves accustomed to shooting and netting sharks for food.

The admiral gave a red cap to the old man he had spoken to. But he, despite the talk he had had with the admiral and the cap he had been given, made away as soon as the admiral had taken leave and begun to cross the river; he would not come to the other side of the river. The other two whom the admiral had had in the ships and to whom he had given what has already been related never appeared again.¹ I deduce from these facts that they are a savage, ignorant people, and for that very reason they are so timid. For all which, they are healthy and very clean. So that I am even surer that they are like the wild birds or animals whose feathers and hair the air makes finer than when they are domesticated, and whose bodies are as clean, as plump, and as beautiful as they could possibly be. Which all makes me suppose that these people lodge in no houses or dwellings. The air in which they are nurtured makes them what they are. We, at any rate, did not see any houses of theirs nor anything resembling such.²

The admiral ordered the exile, Afonso Ribeiro, to go with them again. He went, and was there for some time, but returned in the evening, for they made him come. They would not allow him to stay there, though they gave him bows and arrows, and took nothing that was his. Actually, he said, one of them had taken some yellow beads he was wearing, and run off with them; but he had complained, and the others had pursued the thief, taken them from him, and given them back to the owner again. After which they had told him to go. He said that all he had seen amongst them were some little grottoes of green boughs and large fern leaves like those in the province of Entre Douro e Minho.³ So, just before nightfall, we returned to our ships to sleep.

On the Monday, after eating, we all went on shore to take in water. Many of them came up, but not so many as the other times. And they brought very few bows with them. They kept at some distance from us at first, but later, and little by little, some intermingled with us, rejoicing to see us and embracing us. They gave us bows for sheets of paper, or for an old cap, or anything else. Though there were others who sheered away at once. Things turned out so well that a good twenty or thirty of our people went with them to a place where there was a large band of them including girls and women. They brought away from there many bows and headpieces of feathers, some green and others yellow, of which I believe the admiral will send you specimens.

Those who went with them say that they were glad to have them

¹ That is, up to the time when Caminha was writing this part of the letter.

² But see later references.

³ The part of Portugal between the river Minho and the river Douro. The Minho divides Spain and Portugal on the north; Oporto is on the Douro. The Minho and Douro provinces are now spoken of separately. It is the most beautiful region of Portugal, and Caminha came from there.

there. We saw them closer to and more at our leisure that day because we had nearly all intermingled. Some were painted in quarters with those paints, others by halves, and others all over, like a tapestry. They all had their lips pierced; some had bones in them, though many had not. Some wore spiky green seed-shells off some tree,¹ which were coloured like chestnut shells, though they were much smaller. These were full of little red berries which, on being squeezed, squirted out a very red juice with which they dyed themselves. The more they wet themselves after being dyed with this red, the redder they become. They were all shaven to above the ears; likewise their eyelids and eyelashes were shaven. All their foreheads are painted with black paint from temple to temple. This gives the impression of their wearing a ribbon round them two inches wide.

The admiral ordered the exile, Afonso Ribeiro, and the two other exiles to mix in amongst them. And he told Diogo Dias, of Sacavém, to do the same, since he was a merry fellow and knew how to amuse them. He told the exiles to stay there that night. So they all went in amongst those people.

As they afterwards related, they went a good league and a half to a hamlet of nine or ten houses. They said those houses were each as big as this flagship. They were made of wooden planks sideways on, had roofs of straw, and were fairly high. Each enclosed a single space with no partitions, but a number of posts. High up from post to post ran nets,² in which they slept. Down below they lit fires³ to warm themselves.⁴ Each house had two little doors, one at one end and one at the other.⁵ Our men said that thirty or forty people were lodged in each house, and they saw them there. They gave our men such food as they had, consisting of plenty of *inhame*⁶ and other seeds there are in the country which they eat. It was getting late, however, and they soon made all our men turn back, for they would not let any of them stay. They even wanted to come with them, our men said. Our men exchanged some varvels and other small things of little value which they had brought with them for some very large and beautiful red parrots⁷ and two small green ones, some caps of green feathers, and a cloth of many colours, also of feathers, a rather beautiful kind

¹ The annatto tree.

² Of cotton material.

³ The spark was obtained from stones or from wood.

⁴ They were also a protection against the supernatural.

⁵ These huts were lightly built, so that they could be moved from place to place if necessary.

⁶ This is the Portuguese for yam. The Brazilian vegetable was, however, different to the African yam to which this name is usually applied; it was, in fact, a species of mandioc.

⁷ Macaws.

of material, as Your Majesty will see when you receive all these things, for the admiral says he is sending them to you. So our men came back, and we returned to our ships.

After our meal on the Tuesday we went on shore to fetch water and wood and to wash our clothes. There were sixty or seventy on the beach without bows or anything else when we arrived. As soon as we landed they came up to us straight away and did not try to escape. Also many others came up later, a good two hundred, and all without bows. They came in amongst us so readily that some of them helped us to carry out the wood and put it in the boats. They vied with our men in doing this, and it gave them great pleasure. Whilst we were gathering wood, two carpenters formed a large cross out of a piece which had been cut for the purpose the day before. Many of them came and stood around the carpenters. I believe they did so more to see the iron tool it was being made with than to see the cross. For they have nothing made of iron and cut their wood and sticks with stones fashioned like wedges which they fit into a stick between two laths which they tie up very tightly to make them secure. (The men who had been to their houses told us this, because they had seen it there.) They were by now so intimate with us that they almost hindered us in what we had to do.

The admiral sent the two exiles and Diogo Dias back to the village they had visited (or to others, if they should obtain knowledge of any others), telling them not to come back to the ship to sleep in any case, even if they were sent away. So they went off.

Whilst we were cutting timber in the wood, some parrots flew through the trees. Some were green, others grey, some big, others little. It seems to me, after this, that there must be many of them in this land, even though there cannot have been more than nine or ten of those I saw, if so many. We did not see any other birds on that occasion, except some rock pigeons which seemed to me considerably bigger than those in Portugal. Many say they saw doves, but I did not see them. However, as the trees are very tall and thick and of an infinite variety, I do not doubt but that there are many birds in this jungle. Near nightfall we returned to the ships with our wood.

I believe, Sire, that I have as yet given Your Majesty no account of how their bows and arrows are made. The bows are long and black, and the arrows are long also. Their heads are of sharpened cane, as Your Majesty will see from some which I believe the admiral will send you.

We did not go on land on the Wednesday, because the admiral spent the whole day in the supply ship having it cleared and as much as each could take of what was in it carried off to the other ships. But they came down on to the beach in great numbers as

we saw from the ships. There must have been about three hundred of them according to Sancho de Toar, who went there. Diogo Dias and the exile, Afonso Ribeiro, whom the admiral had ordered the day before to sleep there under any circumstances, had come back after nightfall, because they did not want them to remain there. They brought green parrots with them and some black birds, almost like magpies, but different in that they had white beaks and short tails. When Sancho de Toar made for the ship again, some of them wanted to come with him. But he only allowed two youths to do so who were healthy and vigorous. He ordered them to be well cleaned and cared for that night. They ate all the portion they were given¹ and he gave orders, as he said, for them to be provided with a bed with sheets. They slept and took their ease that night. Nothing else worth relating happened on that day.

On Thursday, the last day of April, we ate early, almost in the early morning, and then went on shore for more wood and water. Just as the admiral was thinking of leaving this ship, Sancho de Toar came up with his two guests. As he had not yet eaten, a table-cloth was put down for him and food came for him. So he ate. The guests each had a chair to themselves. They ate very heartily of everything that was given to them, especially cold boiled ham and rice. They were not given wine, because Sancho de Toar said they did not care for it.

After the meal we all got into the boat, and they did, too. A cabin boy gave one of them a large, very curly boar's tusk. He put it into his lip straight away upon taking it, and, since it would not stay fixed there, they gave him a little red wax. So he arranged the back part to stay firm and put the tusk into his lip so that the curve came out upwards. He was as pleased with it as if he had been given a wonderful jewel. As soon as we went on shore, he made off with it at once. And he did not appear there again.

When we left the boat there must have been eight or ten of them on the beach. In a little while more began to come. It seems to me that four hundred or four hundred and fifty must have come on that day. Some of them brought bows and arrows, but they gave them all away in exchange for caps or anything else they were given. They ate what we gave them and some of them drank wine, though others would not. But I should think that if they were made accustomed to it they would drink it very willingly. They were so healthy and well made and gallant in their paint that it was a pleasure to see them. They brought us as much wood as they could with the best will in the world and carried it out to the boats. By now they were tamer and more assured amongst us than we were amongst them.

¹ A sign of greatly increased confidence.

The admiral went with us through the trees a little way till we came to a broad river of abundant waters from which we took in water. This, to our minds, was the same as the one which came down to the beach. We rested a little there and drank and took our ease on its banks amongst the trees. The number, size, and thickness of these trees and the variety of their foliage beggars calculation. There were many palm-trees there from which we gathered several fine dates.

The admiral had said when we had left the boat, that it would be best if we went straight to the cross which was leaning against a tree near the river ready to be set up on the next day, Friday; we ought then all to kneel and kiss it so that they could see the respect we had for it. We did so and signed to the ten or twelve who were there to do the same, and they at once all went and kissed it.

They seem to be such innocent people that, if we could understand their speech and they ours, they would immediately become Christians, seeing that, by all appearances, they do not understand about any faith. Therefore if the exiles who are to remain here learn their speech and understand them, I do not doubt but that they will follow that blessed path Your Majesty is desirous they should and become Christians and believe in our holy religion. May it please God to bring them to a knowledge of it, for truly these people are good and have a fine simplicity. Any stamp we wish may be easily printed on them, for the Lord has given them good bodies and good faces, like good men. I believe it was not without cause that He brought us here. Therefore Your Majesty who so greatly wishes to spread the Holy Catholic faith may look for their salvation. Pray God it may be accomplished with few difficulties.

They do not plough or breed cattle. There are no oxen here, nor goats, sheep, fowls, nor any other animal accustomed to live with man. They only eat this *inhame*, which is very plentiful here, and those seeds and fruits that the earth and the trees give of themselves. Nevertheless, they are of a finer, sturdier, and sleeker condition than we are for all the wheat and vegetables we eat.

While they were there that day they danced and footed it continuously with our people to the sound of one of our tambourines,¹ as if they were more our friends than we theirs. If we signed to them asking them if they wanted to come to our ships they at once came forward ready to come. So that, if we had invited them all, they would all have come. We did not, however, take more than four or five with us that night. The admiral took two, Simão de Miranda one whom he took as a page, and Aires Gomes another, also as a page. One of those whom the admiral took was one of the guests who had been brought him when we

¹ Rhythm was the essential basis of their dances.

first arrived here; on this day he came dressed in his shirt¹ and his brother with him. That night they were very handsomely treated, not only in the way of food, but also to a bed with mattress and sheets, the better to tame them.

To-day, Friday, 1st May,² in the morning, we went on shore with our banner. We made our way up the river and disembarked on the southern bank at a place where it seemed best to us to set up the cross so that it might be seen to the best advantage. There the admiral marked the place for a pit to be made to plant the cross in. Whilst they were digging this, he and all of us went for the cross, down the river to where it was. We brought it from there as in a procession, with the friars and priests singing in front of us. There were a quantity of people about, some seventy or eighty. When they saw us coming, some of them went to help us to support the cross. We passed over the river along by the beach. We then went to set up the cross where it was to be at some two bow-shots from the river. When we went to do this a good hundred and fifty of those people and more came up. The cross was then planted, with Your Majesty's arms and motto on it, which had before been fastened to it, and they set up an altar by its side. Friar Henrique said Mass there, and the singing and officiating was done by the others who have been already mentioned. About fifty or sixty of the people of the place were at the Mass all on their knees as we were. When the Gospel came and we all stood with uplifted hands, they arose with us, lifted their hands, and stayed like that till it was ended. After which they again sat, as we did. When God's Body was elevated and we knelt, they all knelt and lifted their hands as we did and were so silent that I assure Your Majesty it much increased our devotion.

They stayed with us thus until the Communion was over. After the Communion, the friars and priests communicated, as did the admiral and some of us. Since the sun was very strong some of them arose whilst we were communicating, but others stayed to the end. Amongst those who stayed was a man of fifty or fifty-five years old—or rather he came up amongst those already there and also called others to come. He went in amongst them and spoke to them pointing to the altar and afterwards at Heaven, as if he were speaking to a good purpose. We took it so.

When Mass was over, the priest removed his vestments, and mounted on a chair near the altar in his surplice. He preached to us on the Gospel and about the Apostles whose day it was. At the end of the sermon he referred to the aim of your most holy and virtuous quest, which caused much devoutness.

¹ Though they had little leadership, their communal life does not seem to have been without notions of property.

² St. Philip and St. Jude.

The men who stayed all through the sermon looked at him as we did. The one I have spoken of called others to come. Some came and some went. At the end of the sermon Nicolau Coelho brought a number of tin crucifixes which had remained over from his former journey. It was thought well that those people should each have one hung round their necks. Friar Henrique stood beside the cross for this purpose. There he hung a crucifix round each of their necks, first making him kiss it and raise his hands. Many came for this. All who came, some forty or fifty, had crucifixes hung round their necks.

At last, a good hour after midday, we went to the ships to eat. The admiral took with him the man who had pointed out the altar and Heaven to the others; he also took a brother of his. The admiral did him much honour and gave him a Moorish shirt and his brother a shirt like the others had had.

My opinion and every one's opinion is that these people lack nothing to become completely Christian except understanding us; for they accepted as we do all they saw us do, which makes us consider that they have no idolatry or worship. I believe that if Your Majesty could send someone who could stay awhile here with them, they would all be persuaded and converted as Your Majesty desires. Therefore, if any one is coming out here, let him not omit to bring a clergyman to baptize them. For, by that time, they will have knowledge of our religion through the two exiles who are remaining with them, who also communicated to-day.

Only one woman came with those who were with us to-day. She was young and stayed throughout the Mass. We gave her a cloth to cover herself with and put it around her. But she did not pull it down to cover herself when she sat down. Thus, Sire, the innocence of Adam himself was not greater than these people's, as concerns the shame of the body. Your Majesty will judge if people who live in such innocence could be converted or no if they were taught the things that belong to their salvation.

Our last action was to go and kiss the cross in their presence. We then took our leave and went to eat.

I think, Sire, that two cabin-boys will also stay with the exiles we are leaving here, for they escaped to land in the skiff to-night and have not returned again. We think, I say, that they will stay, because, if God be willing, we are taking our departure from here in the morning.

It appears to me, Sire, that the coast of this country must be a good twenty or twenty-five leagues in length from the most southerly point we saw to the most northerly point we can see from this port. In some parts there are great banks along by the shore, some of which are red and some white; inland it is all flat and very

full of large woods. All the coastal country from one point to the other is very flat and very beautiful. As to the jungle, it seemed very large to us seen from the sea; for, look as we would, we could see nothing but land and woods, and the land seemed very extensive. Till now we have been unable to learn if there is gold or silver or any other kind of metal or iron there; we have seen none. However, the air of the country is very healthful, fresh, and as temperate as that of Entre Douro e Minho; we have found the two climates alike at this season. There is a great plenty, an infinitude of waters. The country is so well-favoured that if it were rightly cultivated it would yield everything, because of its waters.

For all that, the best fruit that could be gathered hence would be, it seems to me, the salvation of these people. That should be the chief seed for Your Majesty to scatter here. It would be enough reason, even if this was only a rest-house on the voyage to Calicut. How much more so will it be if there is a will to accomplish and perform in this land what Your Majesty so greatly desires, which is the spreading of our holy religion.

Thus I have given Your Majesty an account of what I have seen in this land. If at some length, Your Majesty will pardon me, since my desire to tell you all made me relate it with such minuteness. And since, Sire, Your Majesty may be sure of my very faithful service in my present duties as in whatever may do you service, I beg of you as a signal favour that you send for Jorge de Ossório, my son-in-law, from the island of São Tomé¹—I should take this as a great kindness from you.

I kiss Your Majesty's hands.

From this Pôrto-Seguro,² in Your Majesty's island of Vera Cruz, to-day, Friday, 1st May 1500.³

PERO VAZ DE CAMINHA.

¹ Another exile with a mission; this time to the Cape Verde Islands.

² Literally safe port. To-day a town stands there.

³ The original appears to have been written on successive days. This creates an occasional confusion of tenses which the translator has removed.