

~~(the island which is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic). It was the start of the European conquest of the Western Hemisphere.~~

...

We begin the chapter with the diary of Christopher Columbus from his first voyage to the Americas. The only version of the diary of the first voyage that we have is the one transcribed by Bartolomé de Las Casas in the 1530s. "Barring the unlikely discovery of the long-lost original *Diario* or of the single complete copy ordered for Columbus by Queen Isabella, Las Casas's partly summarized, partly quoted version is as close to the original as it is possible to come," note historians Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. The Las Casas manuscript also disappeared, but a single copy was discovered around 1790.

It should be noted that Las Casas is sometimes paraphrasing, rather than quoting, Columbus, and that Columbus often refers to himself in the third person or impersonally as "the Admiral" in his own writing.

The *Diario* of Christopher Columbus (October 11–15, 1492)¹

THURSDAY 11 OCTOBER [1492]

He steered west-southwest. They took much water aboard, more than they had taken in the whole voyage. They saw petrels and a green bulrush near the ship. The men of the caravel *Pinta* saw a cane and a stick, and took on board another small stick that appeared to have been worked with iron, and a piece of cane, and other vegetation originating on land, and a small plank. The men of the caravel *Niña* also saw other signs of land and a small stick loaded with barnacles. With these signs, everyone breathed more easily and cheered up. On this day, up to sunset, they made 27 leagues.

After sunset, he steered his former course to the west. They made up about 12 miles each hour and, until two hours after midnight, made about 90 miles, which is twenty-two leagues and a half. And because the caravel *Pinta* was a better sailer and went ahead of the Admiral [Columbus] it found land and made the signals the Admiral had ordered. A sailor named Rodrigo de Triana saw this land first, although the Admiral, at the tenth hour of the night, while he was on the sterncastle, saw a light, although it was something so faint that he did not wish to affirm that it was land. But he called Pero Gutiérrez, the steward of the King's dais, and told him that there seemed to be a light, and for him to look: and thus he did and saw it. He also

told Rodrigo Sánchez de Segovia, whom the king and queen were sending as vedor [accountant or auditor] of the fleet, who saw nothing because he was not in a place where he could see it. After the Admiral said it, it was seen once or twice; and it was like a small wax candle that rose and lifted up, which to few seemed to be an indication of land. But the admiral was certain that they were near land, because of which when they recited the *Salve*, which in their own way are accustomed to recite and sing, all being present, the Admiral entreated and admonished them to keep a good lookout on the forecandle and to watch carefully for land; and to the man who first told him that he saw land he would later give a silk jacket in addition to the other rewards that the sovereigns had promised, which were ten thousand maravedís [copper coins] as an annuity to whoever should see it first. At two hours after midnight the land appeared, from which they were about two leagues distant. They hauled down all the sails and kept only the *trece*, which is the mainsail without bonnets, and jogged on and off, passing time until daylight Friday, when they reached an islet of the *Lucayos*, which was called *Guanahani* in the language of the Indians. Soon they saw naked people; and the Admiral went ashore in the armed launch, and Martín Alonso Pinzón and his brother Vicente Anes, who was captain of the *Niña*. The Admiral brought out the royal banner and the captains two flags with the green cross, which the Admiral carried on all the ships as a standard, with an F and a Y [for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella], and over each letter a crown, one on one side of the + and another on the other. Thus put ashore they saw very green trees and many ponds and fruits of various kinds. The Admiral called to the two captains and to the others who had jumped ashore and to Rodrigo Descobedo, the *escrivano* [clerk] of the whole fleet, and to Rodrigo Sánchez de Segovia; and he said that they should be witnesses that, in the presence of all, he would take, as in fact he did take, possession of the said island for the king and for the queen his lords, making the declarations that were required, and which at more length are contained in the testimonials made there in writing. Soon many people of the island gathered there. What follows are the very words of the Admiral in his book, about his first voyage to, and discovery of, these Indies. I, he says, in order that they would be friendly to us—because I recognized that they were people who would be better freed and converted to our Holy Faith by love than by force—to some of them I gave red caps, and glass beads which they put on their chests, and many other things of small value, in which they took so much pleasure and became so much our friends that it was a marvel. Later they came swimming to the ships' launches where we were and brought us parrots and cotton thread in balls and javelins and many other things, and they traded them to us for other things which we gave them, such as small glass beads and bells. In sum, they took everything and gave of what they had willingly. But it seemed to me that they were a people very poor in everything. All of them go around as naked as their mother bore them; and the women also, although I did not see more than

one quite young girl. And all those that I saw were young people, for none did I see of more than 30 years of age. They are all very well formed, with handsome bodies and good faces. Their hair coarse—almost like the tail of a horse—and short. They wear their hair down over their eyebrows except for a little in the back which they wear long and never cut. Some of them paint themselves with black, and they are of the color of the Canarians [Canary Islanders], neither black nor white; and some of them paint themselves with white, and some of them with red, and some of them with whatever they find. And some of them paint their faces, and some the whole body, and some of them only the eyes, and some of them only the nose. They do not carry arms nor are they acquainted with them, because I showed them swords and they took them by the edge and through ignorance cut themselves. They have no iron. Their javelins are shafts without iron and some of them have at the end a fish tooth and others of other things. All of them alike are of good-sized stature and carry themselves well. I saw some who had marks of wounds on their bodies and I made signs to them asking them what they were; and they showed me how people from other islands nearby came there and tried to take them, and how they defended themselves; and I believed and believe that they come here from tierra firme to take them by captive. They should be good and intelligent servants, for I see that they say very quickly everything that is said to them; and I believe they would become Christians very easily, for it seemed to me that they had no religion. Our Lord pleasing, at the time of my departure I will take six of them from here to Your Highness in order that they may learn to speak. No animal of any kind did I see on this island except parrots. All are the Admiral's words.

SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER [1492]

As soon as it dawned, many of these people came to the beach—all young, as I have said, and all of good stature—very handsome people, with their hair not curly but straight and coarse, like horsehair; and all of them very wide in the forehead and head, more so than any other race that I have seen so far. And their eyes are very handsome and not small; and none of them are black, but of the color of the Canary Islanders. Nor should anything else be expected since this island is on an east-west line with the island of Hierro in the Canaries. All alike have very straight legs and no belly but are very well formed. They came to the ship with dugouts [canoes] that are made from the trunk of one tree, like a long boat, and all of one piece, and worked marvelously in the fashion of the land, and so big that in some of them 40 and 45 men came. And others smaller, down to some in which one man came alone. They row with a paddle like that of a baker and go marvelously. And if it capsizes on them then they throw themselves in the water, and they right and empty it with calabashes [hollowed out gourds] that they carry. They brought balls

of spun cotton and parrots and javelins and other little things that it would be tiresome to write down, and they gave everything for anything that was given to them. I was attentive and labored to find out if there was any gold; and I saw that some of them wore a little piece hung in a hole that they have in their noses. And by signs I was able to understand that, going to the south or rounding the island to the south, there was there a king who had large vessels of it and had very much gold. I strove to get them to go there and later saw that they had no intention of going. I decided to wait until the afternoon of the morrow and then depart for the southwest, for, as many of them showed me, they said there was land to the south and to the southwest and to the northwest and that these people from the northwest came to fight them many times. And so I will go to the southwest to seek gold and precious stones. This island is quite big and very flat and with very green trees and much water and a very large lake in the middle and without any mountains; and all of it so green that it is a pleasure to look at. And these people are very gentle, and because of their desire to have some of our things, and believing that nothing will be given to them without their giving something, and not having anything, they take what they can and then throw themselves into the water to swim. But everything they have they give for anything given to them, for they traded even pieces for pieces of bowls and broken glass cups, and I even saw 16 balls of cotton given for three Portuguese *çetis* [copper coins], which is a Castilian *blanca* [a copper coin worth half of a maravedí]. And in them there was probably more than an arroba [around 24 pounds] of spun cotton. This I had forbidden and I did not let anyone take any of it, except that I had ordered it all taken for Your Highnesses if it were in quantity. It grows here on this island, but because of the short time I could not declare this for sure. And also the gold that they wear hung in their noses originates here; but in order not to lose time I want to go see if I can find the island of Cipango. Now, since night had come, all the Indians went ashore in their dugouts.

SUNDAY 14 OCTOBER [1492]

~~As soon as it dawned I ordered the ship's boat and the launches of the caravels made ready and went north-northeast along the island in order to see what there was in the other part, which was the eastern part. And also to see the villages, and I soon saw two or three, as well as people, who all came to the beach calling to us and giving thanks to God. Some of them brought us water; others, other things to eat; others, when they saw that I did not care to go ashore, threw themselves into the sea swimming and came to us, and we understood that they were asking us if we had come from the heavens. And one old man got into the ship's boat, and others in loud voices called to all the men and women: Come see the men who came~~