

## **JEAN DE LÉRY (1534–1611)**

### ***HISTORY OF A VOYAGE TO THE LAND OF BRAZIL (1578)***

I do not endorse the fabulous tales found in the books of certain people who, trusting to hearsay, have written things that are completely false; yet I am not ashamed to confess that since I have been in this land of America, where everything to be seen—the way of life of its inhabitants, the form of the animals, what the earth produces—is so unlike what we have in Europe, Asia, and Africa that it may very well be called a “New World” with respect to us . . .

A number of cosmographers and other historians of our time have already written about the length, width, beauty, and fertility of that fourth part of the world called “America” . . . as well as of the various navigations in the eighty years since it was first discovered; therefore I will not pause to summarize those matters at length or in a general fashion. My intention and my subject in this history will be simply to declare what I have myself experienced, seen, heard and observed, both on the sea, coming and going, and among the American savages, with whom I visited and lived for about a year.

I will add . . . that . . . the Spaniards boast, and even more do the Portuguese, of having been the first to discover the land of Brazil and, indeed everything from the Straits of Magellan, fifty degrees on the side of the Antarctic Pole, to Peru, and on through to this side of the Equator; they consequently maintain that they are the lords of all those countries. They claim that the French who travel in those parts are usurpers . . . The French, who maintain the contrary—that they have their due share in these new-found countries—, not only refuse to be beaten by the Spaniards (and even less by the Portuguese) but defend themselves valiantly . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

I boarded another ship called the *Grande Roberge* . . . In the other ship, called *Rosée* . . . there were . . . ten young boys, whom we took along to learn the language of the savages, and five young girls, with a woman to watch over them. (These were the first Frenchwomen taken to the land of Brazil; the savages of that country . . . who had never seen any women clothed, were amazed upon their arrival.)

And because these were the first savages that I had seen up close, you can well imagine that I looked at them and studied them attentively. . . . the savages of America who live in Brazil, called the Tupinamba, whom I lived among and came to know for about a year, are not taller, fatter, or smaller in stature than we Europeans are; their bodies are neither monstrous nor prodigious with respect to ours.

But what I have said about these savages is to show that, while we condemn them so austere for going about shamelessly with their bodies entirely uncovered, we ourselves, in the sumptuous display, superfluity, and excess of our own costume, are hardly more laudable. And, to conclude this point, I would to God that each of us dressed modestly, and more for decency and necessity than for glory and worldliness.