

PERO VAZ DE CAMINHA (1450–1500)
THE FIRST LETTER FROM BRAZIL (1500)

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 Mount and the country the Land of the True Cross.

[The inhabitants] are of a dark brown, rather reddish color. 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 ingenious in that matter.

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. 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.

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 around 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.

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 . . . 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 accompanied with few difficulties.

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 . . . There is a great plenty, an infinitude of waters. The country is so well-favored that if it were rightly cultivated, it would yield everything, because of its waters.

From 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 of Your Majesty to scatter here.

Taken from Pero Vaz de Caminha, "The Letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha." In *Early Brazil: A Documentary Collection to 1700*, edited by Stuart B. Schwartz and translated by Clive Willis and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 8–9.