

THEY CAME *Before* COLUMBUS

THE AFRICAN PRESENCE
IN ANCIENT AMERICA



IVAN VAN SERTIMA

"Brilliantly, I think, [Van Sertima] has demonstrated that there is far more to black history than the slave trade. . . . There is no question but that the book is a landmark." —JOHN A. WILLIAMS

THE SECRET ROUTE FROM GUINEA

... and he [Columbus] wanted to find out what the Indians of Hispaniola had told him, that there had come to it from the south and southeast Negro people, who brought those spear points made of a metal which they call guanin, of which he had sent to the king and queen for assaying, and which was found to have thirty-two parts, eighteen of gold, six of silver, and eight of copper.

—*Raccolta*, PARTE I, VOL. I

African guanines were alloys of gold containing copper for the sake of its odor, for it seems that the Negroes like to smell their wealth. The guanines brought home by Columbus were assayed in Spain and were found to contain the same ratio of alloy as those in African Guinea.

—FREDERICK POHL, *Amerigo Vespucci, Pilot Major*

On Saturday evening, March 9, 1493, a week after Columbus had been driven by a storm into Lisbon, following his first voyage to the Indies, he sat down to dinner with the Portuguese king at his court in the valley of Paraiso.¹ Don Juan seemed to be in an extremely good mood. He talked to Columbus as to a close friend, with great candor and sweetness, insisting that his guest not stand, bow or accord him any special deference, but sit beside him at table as an equal. The admiral was surprised, deeply warmed by this hospitality, but marveling, nonetheless, at the apparent ab-

sence of resentment or envy in the king. All through dinner he looked at Don Juan closely, wondering whether the mask would suddenly slip to reveal the malice Columbus believed was beneath. Had not Don Juan sent three armed caravels to track him down last September as he was setting out on his Atlantic journey? Had not the king given orders that on the islands of Madeira, Puerto Sancto and the Azores, and in the regions and harbors where there were Portuguese, Columbus should be taken?² Only last Tuesday Bartholomew Diaz, patron to the king's ship, armed to the teeth, had confronted him, as he lay helpless in the port of Lisbon, his sails split in half by the storm. Diaz had ordered him to leave his ship and render an account to the factors of the king and had pulled back only because Columbus had responded with fighting words, saying he was the Most High Admiral to the Sovereigns of Castile and had to give an account to no one.³

Perhaps, thought Columbus, he had overreacted to the event because of the fatigue and terror he had suffered in the storm. After he had formally presented his letters to Diaz, had not Alvaro Dama, the Portuguese captain, come to his caravel in great state, with kettledrums and trumpets and pipes?⁴ The king too had received him with the highest honors, as befitted a foreign prince. There was nothing, therefore, to be alarmed about. Diaz had issued a routine challenge to a foreign fleet lying at anchor in his country's port. And the *talk* of the three caravels last September (for he had never *seen* them) may have been just alarmist talk. Yet as he sat there, balancing these interpretations in his mind, Columbus felt uneasy and afraid.

He had brought with him some of the Indian hostages he had seized on the island of Guanahani (Watling Island).⁵ These strange guests fascinated the Portuguese court. Not since 62 B.C., when the king of the Suevians presented Quintus Metellus Celer, the Roman proconsul in Gaul, with a gift of "Indians" cast up on the shores of Germany by a storm, had men with skin the tint of red sand been seen in Europe.⁶

If the faintest shadow of his true feelings passed across Don Juan's face during his talk at dinner, it was when he looked at these men. Captives though they were, they became inverted in the

king's agitated mind into a triumphant troop, their vigorous young bodies branded already with the rival insignia of the Spanish crown. He saw them as King Ferdinand's little puppets, signaling with their hands and limbs for the lack and loss of words. Some of them had paint on their faces, as puppets do, and their hair was unreal, as is the hair of puppets, as coarse and black as a horse's tail drooping over the eyebrows. Some appeared to the king like dolls, oriental dolls with eyes of hard, black glass, void of all expression. Within the glass of those eyes he saw the lands he too had dreamed about, and about which mariners and traders in his African service had spoken.⁷ Had he taken the rumors from Guinea more seriously he would have been sitting there that evening, emperor of two continents. The thought of it tormented him. The deep resentments he felt against Columbus, which for diplomatic reasons he had suppressed, crystallized into a beam of mischievous energy directed at the men of the Indies.

After dinner that evening, while he was talking with Columbus, "he ordered a dish of beans brought and placed on a table near them, and by signs ordered an Indian from among those who were there, to designate the many islands of his country that Columbus said he had discovered. The Indian at once showed Española and Cuba and the Lucayos and others. The king noted it with morose consideration and in a moment, as though inadvertently, he undid with his hand what the Indian had constructed. In a few moments he ordered another Indian to do the same with the beans, and this Indian quickly and diligently showed with the beans what the other Indian had shown, adding more islands and lands, giving the reason in his language for all he had shown, though no one understood it. And then the king, recognizing clearly the greatness of the lands discovered and their riches, was unable to conceal his grief at the loss of such things and cried out loudly and impetuously, giving himself a blow with his fist in the breast: 'O you wretched fool! Why did you let an undertaking of such importance slip through your fingers?'"⁸

The mask had fallen with spectacular suddenness. Columbus's fears were realized. Several members of the court surrounded the king. Some of them attributed his grief to the boldness of the ad-

miral and begged leave to kill Columbus on the spot, destroy all the ships awaiting him in Lisbon, nine leagues from the court, so that news of the discovery would not go back to Castile. But Don Juan said that God would damn his soul to hell for it, and that they should not touch the man.⁹

After this frenzied, whispered session with his advisers, Don Juan resumed his conversations with Columbus as if nothing had happened. His face was flushed, but his manner showed none of the agitation which had driven him to that extraordinary outburst. He made it clear, and with a certain grave candor and graciousness, that regardless of his grief and disappointment at not having been Columbus's patron, "he felt great pleasure, nevertheless, that the voyage had been made and had terminated favorably."¹⁰ The whole Christian world should rejoice at this, Don Juan said. His queen was staying in the monastery of San Antonio near the village of Villafranca on the right bank of the Tagus, less than a day's journey from the court. She too would like to see Columbus and accord him every honor before he left for Spain.¹¹

The truth was, having failed to intercept Columbus both on his outward journey and his return, and having no heart now to order his assassination, as some of his advisers had urged, Don Juan quickly reconciled himself to the implications of this breakthrough to the islands and lands west of the ocean-sea. These implications, he knew, could be serious for Portugal. They would call for a repartitioning of the Christian world, a redefinition of the spheres of power and influence assumed by the two great maritime powers.

Before there could be any more Spanish claims to islands and lands within the ocean-sea, he must negotiate the most advantageous terms for the partitioning. He must strive somehow to make Columbus his ally in this, for he would soon be as much a power to be reckoned with as the Sovereigns of Spain. When he returned in triumph, offering up a kingdom beyond the sea to Isabella and Ferdinand, they would be eating out of his hands, hanging on his every word. The admiral would be virtually a prince of the ocean-sea.

But Don Juan knew that the rights and privileges of a private

citizen in and over vast and vague dominions, unless he had the physical force of an army behind him or the spiritual seal of a pope, could vanish in an instant if he lost the favor of the king and queen.¹² He saw clearly the nature of this newfound power and vulnerability, both of which he intended to exploit.

His first ploy, therefore, was to suggest that he could use his influence on behalf of Columbus, if the need were to arise, to see that his agreements with regard to the "discoveries" were honored. Columbus had drafted agreements with the Spanish sovereigns before setting out, making him a partner with the Crown in his prospective discoveries. These agreements (referred to in his diaries as "the Capitulation") had been finalized in his absence and copies of the documents submitted to the Portuguese king. Don Juan said he had looked at these very closely. He understood from his reading of them that the real credit for the "conquest" belonged to Columbus.¹³ He was keen to emphasize that this was Columbus' personal conquest, implying that it was well within the power of the admiral even now to bargain over those lands with any foreign prince with whom he might come to an agreement.¹⁴

Columbus was cautious. He had not yet seen the Capitulation, he said. He knew nothing more than that the king and queen of Spain had advised him not to encroach on Portuguese territory during his journeys, not to go to San Jorge de Mina nor to any other part of Guinea, and this had been announced in all the ports of Andalusia before he set sail. This was his way of saying that Spain and her agents fully respected the Portuguese sphere of power and influence, and that the Portuguese were expected to show equal respect for theirs. Columbus also seemed to imply that he needed no one to act as protector or go-between in the matter of any agreements he might enter with the Sovereigns of Castile. To this Don Juan graciously responded that he was certain mediators would not be necessary in this matter.¹⁵

On the following Sunday and Monday the discussions between the king and the admiral continued. It became clear that Don Juan's real concern was not with the chain of islands Columbus claimed to have discovered in the Gulf of the Ganges. Beyond them, beyond the mainland of Asia (if indeed it were true that

Columbus had chanced, as he claimed, upon Asia by way of the west), to the south and southeast, lay another world. The king was certain of this. Africans, he said, had traveled to that world. It could be found just below the equinoctial line, roughly on the same parallel as the latitudes of his domain in Guinea. In fact, "boats had been found which started out from Guinea and navigated to the west with merchandise."¹⁶ He was a fool not to have sent an expeditionary fleet into these waters in spite of persistent rumors and reports. But Portugal already had its hands full in Africa, and it was concentrating its exploratory energies on the eastern route to India.¹⁷

Columbus listened intently. The information about the Guinea boats was new to him. He had been to Guinea ten years before and had seen the fortress at San Jorge de Mina which Don Juan was then constructing.¹⁸ Little was known of Guinea trade and navigation at that time, for the African world was vast and strange, and the Portuguese had but one consuming interest—gold—in the pursuit of which they had scratched a mere fraction of the Guinea coast. But why was Don Juan telling him all this, and in such a conspiratorial tone? What did he want?

"I want a line," the king said, "drawn across the map of the world from north to south, from pole to pole. This line should be drawn 370 leagues* west of the westernmost islands of the Cape Verde. Let it be the divider between the two Catholic kingdoms. Anything found west of the line goes to you and Spain. Anything found east of the line falls to me and Portugal."¹⁹

As he sat there, brooding on this proposition, Columbus could hear the rain, driven by fierce winds, wasting its fury along the plains of Paraiso. The clamor of the rain and the wind stirred in him strong memories of Africa. He remembered how, at San Jorge de Mina on the Guinea coast, the rain would sometimes come rushing through the trees, sweeping forward like a violent river that had burst its banks, but beaten from passion into impotence by the high brick walls of the Portuguese fort. He used to feel so

* A league was usually calculated as four Roman miles. According to Pohl, Vespucci measured it as four and a half miles.

lost in those days, dismissed as a dreamer, sustained only by a conviction, passionate as the wind, as persistent as rain, storming insistently the minds of those who thought his schemes "chimerical and foolish." He remembered his last audience with Don Juan before he had decided to try his luck in the Spanish court. The king had stared at him with a bored, tired face, his skin strangely puffed by some unknown sickness, his eyes mocking Columbus with disbelief. Now they sat man to man (or was it prince to prince?). Don Juan was actually seeking his help to bring about a new division and reapportionment of power and possessions in the Christian world. Yes, he would go along with the drawing of the line. Yes, he would present the case with all his newfound power and influence at the Spanish court. But surely not out of gratitude for Don Juan's earlier indifference to his exploratory schemes nor his later attempts (if the rumors were correct) to seize him and his ships as they set out across the western ocean. Columbus now saw his advantage. He could name his price. What that price was no one can tell, but before he left the court on Tuesday morning some bargain over the line must have been struck.

This line, as proposed by Don Juan on the strength of his intelligence from Guinea, was finally settled by the two great powers at the Treaty of Tordesillas more than a year later—on June 7, 1494.²⁰ This was years before incursions into South America by either Spain or Portugal. The later "discovery" of the continent placed Brazil east of the line, and so within Portugal's domain of influence (see Plate 1). This region of South America is washed by the North Equatorial current which joins the Canaries current off the Senegambia coast of Africa. This current pulls boats caught in its drift toward the shores of the New World with the irresistible magnetism of a gravitational field. It was along this current that the Portuguese captain Alvares Cabral, driven by a storm off the coast of West Africa in 1500, was blown helplessly but swiftly to Brazil.²¹

One wonders why Columbus, so greedy for his own gain and glory, would, out of the goodness of his heart or a fondness for Portugal, try to promote an agreement on this line, a line which,

as far as Don Juan claimed, however skeptical his listener, could put a potentially rich slice of land into the rival camp. What did he stand to gain except to attract to himself the suspicions of the Spanish? When he raised the matter on behalf of Don Juan at the Spanish court he did so, it seems, with such imprudent force that it led to some contention between himself and King Ferdinand.²² History does not record the details of that quarrel, but it would be interesting to speculate on the line of argument Columbus used to persuade the Spanish to agree to the drawing of the line. There was no basis, he probably said, for Don Juan's belief that land lay east of the line proposed. Spain, therefore, stood to lose little or nothing and to gain the peace and unity of the Catholic world by conceding Don Juan a slice of his hypothetical dominion. To assume that Columbus acted as Portugal's advocate in return for the courtesies he had enjoyed in the valley of Paraiso would be to ignore the history of the man and his extraordinary avarice.

Even those historians who would canonize Christopher Columbus have all agreed he was inordinately greedy. He demanded of Spain one third, one eighth and one tenth of everything found in the New World. "Thus, if the gains amounted to 2,400 dollars for a ship, Columbus would expect to receive first 800 dollars for the third; next 300 dollars for his eighth; and last, 240 dollars for his tenth, making in all 1,340 dollars, receiving more than the Crown."²³

Knowing what a hard bargain the Genoese adventurer had struck with Spain over his potential discoveries, King Ferdinand must have wondered what really went on in the Portuguese court. It was later to appear in charges leveled against Columbus that the storm that drove him into Lisbon was either exaggerated or fabricated, and that he had made for Portugal deliberately in order to intrigue with Don Juan.²⁴ Columbus, Ferdinand knew, was no stranger to the Portuguese court; he had been trying to further his schemes there for nearly fourteen years. He had sailed to Guinea in 1483 on a Portuguese ship. His relationship with Portugal had soured only because its kings Alfonso and Don Juan were both slow to finance his enterprise. The same, however, could have been said of the Spanish sovereigns.²⁵

Isabella at first was not suspicious of her favorite. She attributed his curious advocacy of the Portuguese case to what she thought was his political naïveté. The very month he sailed again for the Caribbean on his second voyage she wrote, warning him: "In this affair of Portugal no determination has been taken with those who are here [Don Juan's ambassadors]; although I believe that the king will come to terms therein, I would wish you to think the contrary, in order that you may not on that account fail or neglect to act prudently and with due caution, so that you may not be deceived in any manner whatever."²⁶

Only after Columbus's tardy response to her request for charts of navigation, and for the precise number and proposed names of the islands he claimed to have discovered off Asia, did she begin to wonder whether he was as open and straightforward as he seemed.²⁷

Two months after the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas, about which the Spanish king had strong misgivings, King Ferdinand wrote Columbus asking him to come home immediately and help them sort out disputes with Portugal arising over the settlement of this extraordinary boundary line. Columbus was in Cuba (which he claimed at that time was the mainland in spite of native pronouncements to the contrary) when a mail boat arrived, carrying the king's letter. Columbus replied promptly, saying he could not go home, for he was too gravely ill to move.²⁸ "Whether you are to go on this business or not," wrote Ferdinand, "write to us very fully all that you know about this matter."²⁹

The matter, however, cooled when Don Juan died of dropsy a year later. His death came as a relief to the Spanish who, in spite of the agreement (and the continuance of their obligation to his successors), were none too eager to fix with an irrevocable finality and precision the limits of their domains within the ocean-sea. Few Spanish maps, in fact, show a recognition of this line.³⁰

Columbus was slow to act on what Don Juan had told him about the Guinea route, which led to the continent in the south. Circumstances made it difficult for him to investigate this matter on his second voyage. One of the reasons may have been his own disarming argument that Portugal stood to gain—and Spain stood to

lose—little or nothing by the drawing of the demarcation line. One can only speculate that part of his secret deal with Don Juan was that he should have a piece of the pie if and when the land was found, so that west of the line he would have his coffers filled by Isabella and Ferdinand, and east of the line by Don Juan.

This kind of double-dealing came as second nature to his fellow countryman Amerigo Vespucci, whom Frederick Pohl tells us “paid homage to both courts and changed flags when it suited his advantage.”³¹ Columbus had some secret understanding with Vespucci, and in a letter to his son, Diego Columbus, there is a strong hint of this. Columbus in this letter, dated 1505, asks his son to contact Vespucci as he is about to appear before the Spanish court but to do so “secretly that there may be no suspicion.” In the same letter Columbus speaks of “payment that has been made to me and is being made” but is afraid to detail this payment, saying, “I will give the information yonder because it is impossible to give it in writing.” If he referred to the usual payments due him for his excursions and discoveries in the Indies, the terms of these were well-known, published and protected by letters-patent or legal articles. Why then the secrecy? Why was it impossible to commit the matter to writing? Why the great fear of arousing suspicion? Also, how do we explain the strange relationship to Vespucci, to whom he refers in this letter as if he were a messenger or agent in his pay: “see what he can do to profit me there [at the court] and strive to have him do it for he will do everything.”³²

This and other pieces of evidence seem to indicate that Columbus was deliberately holding back on South America. His strange insistence to King Ferdinand that Cuba was a continent (although he wrote Luis de Santagel, Chancellor of Aragon, months earlier declaring that the natives, who had lived there for centuries, were certain it was an island)³³ and his equally strange insistence that South America was an island, after the most cursory and superficial examination, may be seen in this light.³⁴ He had committed himself, it seems, to keeping the Spanish away from the southern continent, perhaps to facilitate his deal with the Portuguese. No wonder Ferdinand and Isabella grew suspicious and allowed

Bobadilla to seize Columbus and his brother and drag them back, naked and in disgrace, to Spain.

Whatever Columbus may have personally known or felt or plotted, his argument (nothing but water to the east of the demarcation line) was the best to counter Spanish suspicions and objections to the pact. It was the worst argument, however, to present to the court if he wanted to secure immediate promotion of further explorations to the south. If the theme of the first voyage had been "discovery and exploration," the theme of the second was "colonization and consolidation." The order went out. Take two thousand Spaniards with you! Plant a colony! Build a church! Build a city! Let us have forts, farms, towns! Above all, pursue vigorously the search for gold whenever a break from ordinary labors will permit!³⁵

The building of the new city of Isabella, the struggle to subdue and convert the natives of the Caribbean (who had massacred the first settlement of Spaniards and demolished their fort), occupied most of Columbus's time until his return from his second voyage in 1496. While in Española,^o however, something happened that confirmed and complemented what Don Juan had said. The Indians gave proof that they were trading with black people. They brought to the Spanish concrete evidence of this trade. "The Indians of this Española said there had come to Española a black people who have the tops of their spears made of a metal which they call *gua-nin*, of which he [Columbus] had sent samples to the Sovereigns to have them assayed, when it was found that of 32 parts, 18 were of gold, 6 of silver and 8 of copper."³⁶

The origin of the word *guanin* may be tracked down in the Mande languages of West Africa, through Mandingo, Kabunga, Toronka, Kankanka, Bambara, Mande and Vei. In Vei, we have the form of the word *ka-ni* which, transliterated into native phonetics, would give us *gua-nin*. In Columbus's journal "gold" is given as *coa-na*, while *gua-nin* is recorded as an island where there is much gold. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish

^o Present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

scholar who traveled with Columbus and who was often appalled by his linguistic blunders, even in the use of Castilian Spanish, wrote in the margin of the journal, correcting Columbus, "This guanin is no island but that gold which according to the Indians had an odor for which they valued it much." Similarly, in *Raccolta*, the Italian account of the voyage, one reads "there were pieces of *gua-nin* as large as the caravel's poop."³⁷

The African spears presented by the Española Indians, which corroborated Don Juan's statement about the Guinea boats, were just one in a number of new factors pushing Columbus toward an exploration of the route from Guinea. His brother Bartholomew arrived in Española in command of three caravels on June 24, 1494.³⁸ The admiral had not seen his brother for many years, and Bartholomew knew more, Las Casas tells us, than Christopher himself of the intelligence coming out of the Portuguese-African world.³⁹ Bartholomew had worked as a cartographer in Lisbon. While there, he had drawn numerous maps for mariners, and he witnessed yearly the return of ships which had been navigating to the western lands of Africa by way of the ocean. "Enlightened and moved by the tales told him by those who returned, as one might say, from another world, and himself more versed in maritime affairs, he communicated to his elder brother his reasons and arguments, proving to him that in sailing away from the southern part of Africa and directing his course straight upon the ocean-sea he would surely arrive at continental land."⁴⁰

He confirmed what Don Juan had told Columbus the previous year. When Columbus returned to the Spanish court in 1496 he found everywhere a spirited discussion of these continental lands "said to lie to the south of the lands he had discovered and which the King of Portugal seemed to think lay within his own domain."⁴¹ Jaime Ferrer, "a jeweller and trader in precious stones," also a distinguished geographer who had done extensive traveling in Africa and had been called in by the Spanish sovereigns to head the commission fixing the Tordesillas line, wrote letters to Isabella, who commanded him to get in touch with Columbus and tell him all he had heard about this new continent.⁴² Ferrer said he had picked up his knowledge from Ethiopians and Arabs. He

had had "many conversations in the Levant, in Alcaine and Domas," and from these he had gathered that "within the equinoctial regions there are great and precious things, such as fine stones and gold and spices and drugs . . . the inhabitants are black or tawny . . . when your Lordship [Columbus] finds such a people an abundance of the said things shall not be lacking." His letter ends with the strange rider (which goes beyond mere graciousness and implies that he knew some of this information had already been conveyed to Columbus), "of all this matter, your Lordship knows more when sleeping than I do waking."⁴³

The king and queen were excited. They saw whole new kingdoms opening up. Colonization of a ragbag of islands was not enough. Columbus's mission would not be complete, they said, until these continental lands had been "discovered" and brought under the banner of Spain.⁴⁴

Thus the scene was set for the exploration of the route the African mariners had taken to the New World. Columbus sailed with six ships on May 30, 1498. He issued instructions to three of them to proceed to Española directly while "he ordered the course laid to the way of the south-west, which is the route leading from these islands to the south because then he would be on a parallel with the lands of the Sierra of Loa [Sierra Leone] and the Cape of Sancta Anna in Guinea, which is below the equinoctial line . . . and after that he would navigate to the west, and from there would go to this Española, in which route he would prove the theory of the King Don Juan; and that he thought to investigate the report of the Indians of this Española who said that there had come to Española from the south and south-east a black people who have the tops of their spears made of a metal which they call *guanin*."⁴⁵

The journey by that route proved to be swift and the seas calm. But it suited the Africans far more than the Europeans, who could not bear the sun burning down upon the wild floating grasses of the sea with the same intensity as upon the grasses of the West African savannah lands. The heat tormented them almost to madness as they advanced through the Sargasso Sea. So ardent it was, so penetrating, that Columbus "feared the ships would take fire . . . the butts of wine and water swelled, breaking the hoops of

the casks, the wheat burned like fire: and the pork and salted meat roasted and putrefied." Fortunately the rains came, without which, according to Columbus, none of them, unaccustomed as they were to such burning latitudes, would have escaped alive.⁴⁶

Columbus ended up on a branch of the North Equatorial current which took him initially to a Caribbean island with three great rocks, which made him think of the Holy Trinity. He named this island Trinidad. A little more to the south, however, he did come in sight of the South American mainland (August 1, 1498). Columbus, for some odd reason, would not land.⁴⁷

On this third voyage he came upon more evidence of the contact between Guinea and the New World. From a settlement along the South American coast on which his men landed on Tuesday, August 7, the natives brought "handkerchiefs of cotton very symmetrically woven and worked in colors like those brought from Guinea, from the rivers of Sierra Leone and of no difference."⁴⁸ Not only were they alike in style and color but also in function. These handkerchiefs, he said, resembled *almayzars*—Guinea headdresses and loincloths. "Each one is a cloth so woven in colors that it appeared an *almayzar* with one tied on the head and the other covering the rest."⁴⁹

These were the earliest documented traces of the African presence. Within the first and second decades of the so-called "discovery," African settlements and artifacts were to be sighted by the Spanish. When they were not reported as mere asides, they were ignored or suppressed. But history is not easily buried. In the oral traditions of the native Americans and the Guinea Africans, in the footnotes of the Spanish and Portuguese documents, part of the story lies. Another part lies embalmed under the American and African earth. As this earth is now being lifted by archaeological picks and trowels, a new skeleton emerges of the history of these adjacent worlds.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

For the evidence in this chapter the author draws to the reader's attention a 2,114-page study published in 1903. His interpretation, however, of the events documented in this study is original. John

Boyd Thacher, in his three-volume work on Christopher Columbus—his life, his writings, his voyages—examines all the original documents known and available, in half a dozen languages. Although this work, the labor of a lifetime, is inspired by a blind adulation of Columbus, by a vision of the admiral's "saintly" character and motives, no other work on the man, of which there are many, can match it for its encyclopedic scope and detail. In the footnotes, however (which seem like another book compulsively writing itself), we begin to see the night-side or half-hidden face of history. There emerges, from under all the contradictions and cross-references, the sentences deliberately doctored or deleted in the conventional histories, the little-known deeds and statements of the admiral so nimbly glossed over, an illuminating pattern of consistency, through which we glimpse another image of the man and his time than the one his biographer strives to create.

1. John Boyd Thacher, *Christopher Columbus, His Life, His Work, His Remains*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903, Vol. 1, p. 665.
2. Ibid., p. 518.
3. Ibid., p. 664.
4. Idem.
5. Ibid., p. 537.
6. James Bailey, *The God-Kings and Titans*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973, p. 40. Also, J. V. Luce, "Ancient Explorers," in Geoffrey Ashe (ed.), *The Quest for America*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1971, pp. 91-92.
7. Thacher, op. cit., p. 533.
8. Ibid., p. 666. This extraordinary incident is recorded by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, the first historian of the Indies, as well as by the Portuguese historian Garcia de Resende.
9. Idem.
10. Ibid., p. 665.
11. Ibid., p. 667.
12. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 84. "As Columbus required the countenance of the Princes to hold his discovery, so these Princes required the seal of the Roman pontiff not absolutely

to possess but to maintain in peace their sovereignty in the New World."

13. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 665.
14. This argument was later reflected in Columbus's *Book of Privileges*, in which he claimed "it was in the power of the said Admiral, after God, our Lord, to give them to any Prince with whom he might come to an agreement." See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 3.
15. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 666.
16. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 379.
17. Bartholomew Diaz, patron of the king of Portugal's ship, who intercepted Columbus in the harbor of Rastelo inside the river of Lisbon on March 5, 1493, was the first to push his way southward along the Atlantic coastline of Africa till he turned the southern extremity of the Old World. He did this in 1486, winning for Portugal a southern route to Old India. See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 664.
18. Ibid., p. 282.
19. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 379. References to these discussions are made in Columbus's *Journal of the Third Voyage*. Columbus's son Ferdinand deliberately omits in the *Historie* (as do other works using this source as an authority) passages in the journal related to these discussions between his father and the Portuguese king on the Tordesillas line. He also omits reference to "the views held by King Don Juan of Portugal as to there being great lands within the line and to the south-west." Columbus' son was aware that this could later be presented as evidence of the prior discovery of the American continent.
20. For the full text in Spanish of the Treaty of Tordesillas, see *ibid.*, pp. 165-186.
21. The expedition made by Pedro Alvares Cabral, who sailed from Lisbon for Calicut, March 9, 1500, with thirteen ships, found itself unexpectedly driven from the African coastline by a storm onto the shores of Brazil. Alvares Cabral gave to this region the name of "Terra de Santa Cruz." He returned to Lisbon at the end of July 1501. See *ibid.*, p. 444.
22. Ibid., p. 379.

23. Ibid., p. 541.
24. In a letter sent to the Nurse of Prince Don Juan of Castile in 1500, Columbus notes that when "after losing my sails, I was driven into Lisbon by a tempest, I was falsely accused of having gone there to the King in order to give him the Indies." See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 435.
25. Ibid., p. 698.
26. Letter of Queen Isabella to Columbus dated September 5, 1493. See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 554.
27. Idem.
28. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 377. In his Journal of the Third Voyage, Columbus mentions how the sovereigns sent for him that he should be present at the meetings in regard to the partition and that he could not go, on account of the grave illness which he had incurred in the discovery of Cuba, "which he always regarded as the mainland even until the present time as he could not circumnavigate it." This sentence was suppressed by Ferdinand Columbus in the *Historie*, and one is left to wonder whether Columbus was making a pretense about Cuba being a continent in order to forestall any further exploration south at this stage until the matter of the Tordesillas line (which he had helped to promote on behalf of the Portuguese) was cleared up. It is strange that Columbus should insist in his letter to King Ferdinand that Cuba was the continent, when in earlier correspondence, discovered among the papers of Luis de Santagel, Chancellor of Aragon, Columbus had written, "I have learnt from some Indians whom I have seized that this land was certainly an island." For this reference, see note 33.
29. Letters of the Sovereigns of Spain dated from Barcelona, May 24, 1493, Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 556.
30. Ibid., p. 200. "The Spaniards seemed loath to put the line into their maps."
31. Frederick Pohl, *Amerigo Vespucci, Pilot Major*, New York, Octagon, 1966.
32. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 399.
33. R. H. Major, *Selected Letters of Columbus*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1870, p. 3.

34. Thacher, Vol. 2, p. 371.
35. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 96.
36. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 380.
37. Leo Wiener, *Africa and the Discovery of America*, Philadelphia, Innes and Sons, 1920-1922, Vol. 1.
38. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 344.
39. Las Casas, *Historia*, Lib. 1, cap. 29. See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 341.
40. Antonio Gallo, *De Navigatione Columbi*. See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 340.
41. Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 363.
42. Ibid., p. 365.
43. Letter dated August 5, 1495. See Thacher, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 369.
44. Ibid., p. 363.
45. Ibid., p. 380.
46. Ibid., p. 381.
47. Ibid., p. 371. Although some of his men landed on the South American coast on August 5, 1498, and Columbus held ceremonies of possession (as was the normal protocol in these matters), he himself did not put his foot on the southern continent. He immediately, hastily and mysteriously pronounced it an island.
48. Ibid., p. 392.
49. Ibid., p. 393.