

THE VISIBLE WITNESSES

It is in contradiction to the most elementary logic and to all artistic experience that an Indian could depict in a masterly way the head of a Negro without missing a single racial characteristic, unless he had actually seen such a person. The types of people depicted must have lived in America. . . . The Negroid element is well proven by the large Olmec stone monuments as well as the terracotta items and therefore cannot be excluded from the pre-Columbian history of the Americas.

—ALEXANDER VON WUTHENAU, *The Art of Terracotta Pottery in Pre-Columbian South and Central America*

There is a narrow neck of land between the two Americas, which in a way both joins and splits them. From this point, the Isthmus of Darien, one could—if one flew above the clouds with the wingspan and vision of the condor—look down upon the two great seas that divide the world, the waters of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

From such a point, though at a much lower altitude and with only a fraction of the range and binocular vision of the condor, the Spanish explorer Vasco Nuñez de Balboa stood on the summit of the Sierra de Quarequa, looking down upon the Mar del Sur, or Sea of the South, billowing far below him.

It was the twenty-fifth day of September 1513.

It had been a long and dangerous march through the forests of the isthmus to this lonely peak in Darien. Below him at last lay the great sea of which the son of Comogre, the Indian *cacique*, had spoken. On this sea, according to what the young man had said, boats as big as the brigantines sailed, from a land richer in gold than any the Spanish had so far seen. (Strange, how the Indians always seemed to be pointing a finger southward, whispering, "Gold! gold! gold!" into the greedy, expectant ears of the Spaniards. When they sailed in the direction of that finger, under the mesmeric spell of that chant, there was still another Indian, his finger beckoning ever farther southward, with the same enchanting whisper, "Gold! gold! gold!" Were these savages trying to make fools of them?) The thought occurred to Balboa, but it blew at the back of his mind faintly. In the forefront was the warm, bright vision of golden sands beyond the Mar del Sur.

He recalled the morning his companions had sat on the porch of the great longhouse of Comogre. They were still in a partial stupor from the festivities of the previous day. Comogre had entertained them lavishly and had presented Balboa with four thousand ounces of golden ornaments. The Spanish were dazzled by this generosity, but furious arguments broke out among them when Balboa ordered everything to be weighed so that the king's Exchequer could have its fifth part before any division of the spoils. The men hovered darkly over the weighing scales like crows over a battlefield.

Suddenly, in the midst of the commotion, in strode the eldest son of Comogre. He was obviously incensed by the vulgar fuss and noise. The spectacle of these foreigners wrangling on the porch of his father's palace disgusted him. To the amazement of everyone, he leaped at the scales and knocked them over with his fist, scattering gold all over the porch.

They were fighting over trifles, he told them contemptuously. If they were so greedy for gold, why, over those mountains—he pointed in the direction of the inevitable south—there was another sea. On it sailed boats as big as theirs, from a land where they would find more gold than they could ever weigh.

The Spaniards in Balboa's company were so delighted by news of

this sea and the land beyond and the gold that it blunted any sense of insult they might have felt at this impetuous outburst of the chief's son. His words ran through the Spanish settlements in Darien like a brushfire. Balboa himself was so overwhelmed by the glittering prospect that he decided forthwith to remove all obstacles in the way of his pursuit of it. In a rash, daring action that was later to cost him his head but shower him for a moment in glory, he usurped the government of Darien, drove out the governor, Nicuesa, imprisoned the chief justice, Encisco, and marched at the head of his own army into the forests of the isthmus. He thus stole a march on Pedro Arias, whom the Spanish had officially sent out to check on the rumor of the new land and sea. "Partly by force, partly by conciliation and by pacifying the native kings in the area with presents," Balboa made it across the mountains.

As he stood on the summit of Quarequa at last, he sank to his knees and gave thanks to God. He ordered his companions to build a wooden cross and plant it on the spot where he had knelt. He then went down the southern slope of Quarequa and, making his way to the shore of the bay, ran like a madman with a banner straight into the sea, declaring that he had taken possession of it in the name of Jesus Christ and King Ferdinand.¹

✓ Inspired by this discovery of the southern sea, Balboa and his men decided to push farther south along the isthmus. Under the shadow of Quarequa, they came upon an Indian settlement where, to their astonishment, they found a number of war captives who were plainly and unmistakably African. These were tall black men of military bearing who were waging war with the natives from some settlement in the neighborhood. "Balboa asked the Indians whence they got them but they could not tell, nor did they know more than this, that men of this color were living nearby and they were constantly waging war with them. These were the first Negroes that had been seen in the Indies."²

Peter Martyr, the first historian of America, reports on this remarkable meeting between the Spanish explorers and the blacks of Darien. "The Spaniards," wrote Martyr, "found Negroes in this province. They only live one day's march from Quarequa and they

are fierce. . . . It is thought that Negro pirates from Ethiopia established themselves after the wreck of their ships in these mountains. The natives of Quarequa carry on incessant war with these Negroes. Massacre or slavery is the alternate fortune of these peoples.”³

Martyr uses the word “Ethiopia” as a general term for Africa. He is not suggesting a specific country in Africa as the origin of these mysterious Africans sighted by the Spanish. He could not conjecture on their exact country of origin or tribal identity, but he certainly knew from his own acquaintance with Africa, as a diplomat to Egypt from the Spanish court, that there was nothing far-fetched about African boats being washed up as wrecks on the other side of the ocean’s coast. His comment also makes it clear that the African settlement was large enough to enable its members to wage wars of aggression or defense within the hostile environment in which they found themselves.

An encounter with New World Negroes was also reported off Colombia. Fray Gregoria Garcia, a priest of the Dominican order who spent nine years in Peru in the early sixteenth century, pinpoints an island off Cartagena, Colombia, as the place where the Spanish first encountered blacks in the New World. Once again, as in the Balboa incident in Darien, the blacks were found as captives of war among the Indians. In a book silenced by the Spanish Inquisition, Garcia wrote, “Here were found slaves° of the lord—Negroes—who were the first our people saw in the Indies.”⁴

Darien and Colombia were easily accessible to African shipwrecked mariners. These places lie within the terminal area of currents that move with great power and swiftness from Africa to America. These currents may be likened to marine conveyor belts. Once you enter them you are transported (even against your will, even with no navigational skill) from one bank of the

° The word used by Garcia, *esclavos*, means “slaves,” but it is important to point out here that this party of blacks who were caught away from their settlement in Quarequa were not “slaves” in the loaded post-Columbian American sense. They were war captives. The blacks also killed and made war captives of Indians they caught in these raids along the Isthmus, as Peter Martyr points out. That was the fortune of war, then as now.

ocean to the other. We shall deal with them and all the problems of the Atlantic sea voyage in Chapter 4, but it is important to point out here how many small, isolated black communities have been found on the American seaboard at the terminal points of these currents. Alphonse de Quatrefages, professor of anthropology in the Museum of Natural History in Paris, noted in his study *The Human Species* (published in 1905) that "black populations have been found in America in very small numbers and as isolated tribes in the midst of very different nations. Such are the Charruas of Brazil, the black Caribees of Saint Vincent in the Gulf of Mexico, the Jamassi of Florida. . . . Such again is the tribe of which Balboa saw some representatives in his passage of the Isthmus of Darien in 1513. Yet it would seem, from the expressions made use of by Gomara, that these were true Negroes. This type was well known to the Spaniards. . . ."5

De Quatrefages shows how the location of these African New World communities coincides with the terminal points of Africa-to-America currents or sea roads. "We only find these black men in America in those places washed by the Kouro-Siwo [a Pacific current known as the black stream] and the Equatorial current of the Atlantic or its divisions. A glance at the maps of Captain Kerhallet will at once show the rarity and distribution of these tribes. It is evident that the more or less pure black elements have been brought from Africa through some accident at sea; they have there mixed with the local races, and have formed those small isolated groups which are distinguished by their color from the surrounding tribes."6

These Spanish sightings of Africans in the New World and the later discovery by anthropologists of distinctive black settlements along the American seaboard (outside of the mainstream of the post-Columbian slave complex) constitute only one strand of the evidence of pre-Columbian contact between Africa and America. An overwhelming body of new evidence is now emerging from several disciplines, evidence that could not be verified and interpreted before, in the light of the infancy of archaeology and the great age of racial and intellectual prejudice. The most remarkable examples of this evidence are the realistic portraitures of Negro-

Africans in clay, gold and stone unearthed in pre-Columbian strata in Central and South America.

It has only been within the last decade, however, that this evidence has begun to filter down to the general public. When in 1862 a colossal granite head of a Negro was found in the Canton of Tuxtla, near the place where the most ancient of pre-Columbian statuettes were discovered, the historian Orozco y Berra declared in his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* that there was bound to be an important and intimate relationship between Mexicans and Africans in the pre-Columbian past.⁷ In his time, however, the Negroid heads could not be conclusively dated. We now know, without the shadow of a doubt, through the most modern methods of dating, that some of the Negroid stone heads found among the Olmecs and in other parts of Mexico and Central America are from as early as 800 to 700 B.C. Clearly American history has to be reconstructed to account for this irrefutable piece of archaeological data. Explanations, not excuses, have got to be found. The implications of these discoveries can no longer be dismissed or ignored. The time has come to disperse the cloud of silence and skepticism that has settled over this subject for a century.

A break in that cloud came about seven years ago with the work of Alexander von Wuthenau. Fired by a passionate conviction that America was an inseparable part of the mainstream of world culture before 1492 and excited by the vitality and sophistication of pre-Columbian art (so long neglected in the great art museums of the world), this art historian and lecturer carried out intensive diggings and investigations in Mexico. Out of his dedicated commitment emerged a wealth of visible witnesses to the pre-Columbian presence of Africans and others in the Americas. His book *The Art of Terracotta Pottery in Pre-Columbian South and Central America*⁸ broke new ground. It shattered conventional assumptions in the field of American art as well as history. But its favorable reception has only become possible because there has been a genuine change, however gradual, however slight, in the climate of prejudice that has long inhibited any serious scholarly inquiry into this matter.

Two recent conferences of American anthropologists have contributed to this change. These were the International Congress of Americanists, held in Barcelona in 1964, at which a French anthropologist said that the only things missing in connection with the Negroid terra-cottas of ancient America as final proof of the African presence, were Negroid skeletons, which have since been reported in early pre-Christian as well as medieval layers;⁹ and the Society for American Archaeology, which held a symposium at Santa Fe, New Mexico, in May 1968 to discuss the problems of pre-Columbian contact between the continents and concluded: "*Surely there cannot now be any question but that there were visitors to the New World from the Old in historic or even prehistoric time before 1492.*"¹⁰

What von Wuthenau has done is to open a door upon the photo gallery of the Americas. For, lacking the camera, the ancient and medieval Americans sought to capture for all time, in the art of realistic portraiture through the medium of clay, the significant figures of their respective generations. Africans move through all their major periods, from the time of the Olmec culture around 800 B.C., when they arise in massive stone sculptures, through the medieval Mexico of the Mayas, when they appear not only in terra-cotta portraits but on golden pectorals and on pipes, down to the late post-Classic period, time of the Conquest, when they begin to disappear as they disappeared all over the world until today, reemerging once more as significant figures.

A head from the post-Classic period stares at us across five centuries with a lifelike power and directness (see Plate 5). This is clearly the type of African who came here in 1310 in the expeditionary fleet of Abubakari the Second of Mali. These men made a tremendous visual impression upon the Mixtecs, last of the great pre-Columbian potters, for this is one of their finest clay sculptures. It was found in Oaxaca in Mexico. Its realism is striking. No detail is vague, crudely wrought or uncertain. No stylistic accident can account for the undisputed Negro-ness of the features. From the full, vivid lips, the darkened grain of the skin, the prognathic bone formation of the cheeks, the wide nostrils, the generously fleshed nose, down to the ceremonial earring and the cotton cap

Cadamosto noted on warrior boatmen on the Gambia, the American artist has deftly caught the face of this African.

The court tradition of Mali and documents in Cairo tell of an African king, Abubakari the Second, setting out on the Atlantic in 1311. He commandeered a fleet of large boats, well stocked with food and water, and embarked from the Senegambia coast, the western borders of this West African empire, entering the Canaries current, "a river in the middle of the sea" as the captain of a preceding fleet (of which only one boat returned) described it.¹¹ Neither of the two Mandingo fleets came back to Mali to tell their story, but around this same time evidence of contact between West Africans and Mexicans appears in strata in America in an overwhelming combination of artifacts and cultural parallels. A black-haired, black-bearded figure in white robes, one of the representations of Quetzalcoatl, modeled on a dark-skinned outsider, appears in paintings in the valley of Mexico (see Chapter 5), while the Aztecs begin to worship a Negroid figure mistaken for their god Tezcatlipoca because he had the right ceremonial color. Negroid skeletons are found in this time stratum in the Caribbean (see Postscript). "A notable tale is recorded in the Peruvian traditions . . . of how black men coming from the east had been able to penetrate the Andes Mountains."¹² Figures, like the one described above, return to prominence in American clay. We shall deal with this in subsequent chapters, but it is important to bear in mind that the Negroid terra-cottas are scattered over several periods and bear witness, in conjunction with other evidence, that this was just one of several contacts between the two continents, joined throughout pre-Columbian history by a long but easily accessible and mobile waterway.

Onto this waterway Africans sometimes stumbled accidentally. This may account for some of the Negroid heads in Plate 2, which represent Africans appearing on the plateau of Mexico and other parts of Mesoamerica just before and after Christ. Here we see native American artists struggling in clay two thousand years ago to come to terms realistically with the alien physiognomy of the African. This struggle is not always successful. Prognathism or some other distinct Negro-African feature is sometimes deliber-

ately overemphasized for effect, producing vivid but grotesque evocations. Nonetheless, the dense, close curl and kink of Negroid hair, the goatee beard, so uncommon to the hairless American Indian chin, and the heavy ear pendants, a popular West African feature, come through quite clearly. With respect to the latter, Cadamosto, the Portuguese explorer who visited the Senegambian border of Mali in 1450, notes "these people all have their ears pierced round with holes in which they wear various ear rings, one behind the other."

There may be some stylistic distortion in the Negroid head from the Mandingo contact period in Plate 6 (bottom row). The chin juts out with an exaggerated and primitive power. Strangely enough, it was regarded by the American Indians as a sacred face. It was venerated later by the Aztecs, simply because it was black, as their god Tezcatlipoca.¹³ Black gods and *gods with Negroid features* (for black is sometimes just a ceremonial color) may be found among the American Indians. Another black god is the god of jewelers, Nualpilli. The Negroid features of this god were sculpted in green stone by the Mexicans, while his kinky hair was cast in pure gold.¹⁴ There is also the god of traveling merchants, of whom we shall later speak, Ek-chu-ah, who enters Mayan mythology in the wake of the Mandingo (see Plate 18).

It is hard for many to imagine the Negro-African figure being venerated as a god among the American Indians. He has always been represented as the lowliest of the low, at least since the era of conquest and slavery. His humiliation as a world figure begins, in fact, with the coming of Columbus.* It was in the very decade of his "discoveries" that the black and white Moors were laid low. The image of the Negro-African as a backward, slow and un inventive being is still with us. Not only his manhood and his freedom but even the memory of his cultural and technological achievements before the day of his humiliation seem to have been erased from the consciousness of history. Even in the thinking of Leo Wiener, M.D.W. Jeffreys and James Bailey, white scholars

* Columbus himself was the first to initiate slavery in the Americas, even against the wishes of the Spanish sovereigns.

who have all sought to prove the Negro-African presence in pre-Columbian America, the black man still figures as an inferior.

Bailey, in his book *The God-Kings and Titans*, disclaims any indigenous base for African cultures before the Arabs and Romans. "That African culture, prior to the Arab and Roman gold-trade, was an independent African invention . . . is nonsense."¹⁵ He sees them in ancient America simply as mercenary soldiers of the Phoenicians. Leo Wiener, the Harvard philologist, assumes that the great Mali empire of medieval West Africa owed all its refinements, even its animist ritual and magic, to the Arab-Islamic civilization. The Mandingo came to America before Columbus, he declares, but carrying another man's cultural baggage. He sees the Negro-African as simply a conductor of Islamic cultural electricity.¹⁶ The South African anthropologist M.D.W. Jeffreys refers to the Negro in one of his articles as "a West African item,"¹⁷ and while he presents forceful arguments for his pre-Columbian presence, suggests that he came here as a porter and paddler for the Arabs. For all these men, therefore, the image of the Negro-African has not changed. They remain victims of the myth created and sustained for half a millennium, while appearing to strive manfully to dispel it. For them, before and after Columbus, the Negro is still a beggar in the wilderness of history, a porter, a paddler, a menial, a mercenary—the eternal and immutable slave.

If this had indeed been the case, why should the Olmecs erect huge monuments to him which dwarf all other human figures in the Americas? Why should some of the Negroid representations be venerated among the Maya and Aztecs as deities? Why should the finest of American potters sculpt such vivid and powerful portraits of this contemptible man? Can we image modern black artists in Mozambique building colossal monuments to the Portuguese soldiers who clashed with the freedom fighters of Cabral? Or the South African whites, for that matter, erecting altars and temples to the garbage collectors or street cleaners of Pretoria? These contradictions do not appear as the glaring absurdities they really are unless a shift in consciousness occurs. Such a shift is required if we are to reconstruct the history of

America and Africa during those periods in which these worlds and cultures are seen to collide and converge. We cannot see very far if we enter an ancient time with contemporary blinkers, even if our pathways into the past are illuminated by a hundred torches lit by the most recent archaeological discoveries. What is needed far more than new facts is a fundamentally new vision of history.

In this new vision the Atlantic is an open sea long before Columbus. But accidental-drift voyages by African men, except in those cases where they brought fruit or grain with them alien to America (and this happened in prehistory at least twice) would in themselves have a very minimal effect, if any. Planned expeditions, however, or expeditions intended for other destinations in Africa which were blown off-course, would be a different matter. They would bring not only a substantial but a select group of aliens to American shores. This may account for the presence of Negroid women in pre-Columbian America (see Plate 3). These women, of course, did not rule out interbreeding between the Africans and the natives, as terra-cottas showing American Indians with a Negroid strain attest, but their coming managed to prevent a clean obliteration of the evidence of an African presence through its total absorption into the genetic pool of the American and to preserve through the generations several distinctive racial traits.

One of these women from the early pre-Classic period bears a striking resemblance to the ebony head of the Egyptian queen Tiy, the Negroid mother of Tutankhamen. This racial type—Negro-Egyptian—with its peculiar coiffure, facial geography and expression, appears in the Mexican heartland around 800–700 B.C.

The most remarkable representations of Negroes in America are those that appear at this time. So realistic are these representations that even the most conservative Americanists have found it difficult to deny their Negroid identity, but they have been found in such incredibly early strata and as an integral part of such an early American culture that some investigators have been forced to ignore their embarrassing existence. No other archaeological

discovery in the history of this hemisphere has presented such a puzzle. The questions they raise are as momentous as those once raised by the ancient observatory at Stonehenge and still hovering over the mysterious giants of Easter Island.

There is no denying the great antiquity of these Negroid figures. The archaeological contexts in which they have been found have been radiocarbon-dated.¹⁸ Carbon 14 can only be wrong one hundred years either way (if we are dating materials less than seven thousand years old) and indisputably clear carbon-14 datings have been procured for organic materials associated with the culture and people who produced these Negroid figures. There is no denying their Negro-ness either. The ancient Americans who sculpted them have been shown to be absolute masters of realistic portraiture, and did not arrive at these distinctive features through accidental stylization. The features are not only Negro-African in type but individual in their facial particulars, canceling out the possibility of ritual stereotypes of an unknown race produced by some quirk of the sculptor's imagination.

The people who were host to these Negro-African figures are known as the Olmecs. At the sacred center of the Olmec culture—La Venta—about eighteen miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico, which flows into the Atlantic, there stood four colossal Negroid heads, six to nine feet high, weighing up to forty tons each. They stood in large squares or plazas in front of the most colorful temple platforms, the sides and floors of which were of red, yellow and purple.¹⁹ They stood twelve to twenty times larger than the faces of living men. They were like gods among the Olmecs. In this center of La Venta there were great altars. One of these (known as the third altar) was made out of one of the Negroid heads, flattened on top for that purpose. A speaking tube was found to go in at the ear and out at the mouth so that the figure could function as a talking oracle,²⁰ a detail we shall see later to be of considerable significance in identifying the area of the Old World from which these Africans came.

The construction of these Negroid figures is a fact of staggering proportions. Imagine forty tons of basalt block mined from stone

quarries eighty miles away and transported to the holy center of La Venta—not in pieces but in one massive chunk—for the Negroid heads seem to be sculpted out of gigantic balls, not jointed shelves or built-up layers of stone. Hundreds of these balls making perfect spheres are still found today in Central America, suggesting that this was the way the stone may have been found by the Olmecs, huge basalt bubbles wrought by freak volcanic or meteoric activity.²¹ This would have facilitated rolling them across vast tracts of land. Other investigators, however, have suggested that crude stone was transported from quarries eighty miles downriver on rafts.²² It was not only at La Venta that these extraordinary heads were found. In all, eleven colossal Negroid heads appear in the Olmec heartland—four at La Venta, five at San Lorenzo and two at Tres Zapotes in southern Vera Cruz.²³

The Olmecs who lived in the jungled country of the Gulf Coast and built these powerful monuments to the Negro were obsessed with the figure of the jaguar. The jaguar motif appears on hundreds of clay, stone and jade figures that survive their culture. Half-jaguar, half-human monsters with small, fat baby faces and snarling mouths, sexless and smooth with the obesity of eunuchs, haunt and stamp this culture with a signature both unique and foreign. "This feline," says Frederick Peterson in his book *Ancient Mexico*, "evidently proceeds from tropical regions and was imported into Mexico." Peterson also mentions investigations into the skeletons of the ancient Mexicans. He pinpoints a "a substratum with Negroid characteristics that intermingled with the magicians."²⁴ In September 1974 the Polish craniologist Dr. Andrzej Wiercinski disclosed to the Forty-First Congress of Americanists, held in Mexico, that "some of the skulls from Tlatilco, Cerro de las Mesas and Monte Albán [all pre-Christian sites in Mexico] show, to a different degree, a clear prevalence of the total Negroid pattern."²⁵ In February 1975 a Smithsonian Institution team reported the find of two Negroid male skeletons in a grave in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This grave had been used and abandoned by the Caribs long before the coming of Columbus. Soil from the earth layers in which the skeletons were found was dated to

A.D. 1250. A study of the teeth showed a type of "dental mutilation characteristic of early African cultures," and clamped around the wrist of one of the skeletons was a clay vessel of pre-Columbian Indian design.²⁶

Skeletons have also been found in pre-Columbian layers in the valley of the Pecos River, which, flowing through Texas and New Mexico, empties via the Rio Grande into the Gulf of Mexico. Professor Hooton, a physical anthropologist, reporting on these finds, said of the skeletons: "The Pecos skulls resemble most closely crania of Negro groups coming from those parts of Africa where Negroes commonly have some perceptible infusion of Hamitic blood."²⁷

Finds like these, in addition to the stone heads and Negroid clay masks of the same period (like the Negroid "Silenus" mask in the bottom row of Plate 6) force us to consider afresh the extraordinary parallels between ancient America and Africa in this period, dismissed before as mere coincidences. Is it not strange that it is in this very period when the Negro-African begins to appear in Mexico and to affect significantly the Olmec culture that the first pyramids, mummies, trepanned skulls, stelae and hieroglyphs begin to appear in America? Is it not strange that it is during this very period that a Negro-African dynasty gains ascendancy in Egypt and black pharaohs (Negro-Nubians) don the plumed serpent crown of Upper and Lower Egypt? No mummies, no pyramids, appear in this hemisphere during the heyday of these things in the Egyptian world, but suddenly they spring up in full flower at the same point in time as the Negro-Nubians usher in an Egyptian cultural renaissance, restoring these features that had long lapsed in Egypt and for which there are no evolutionary precedents in America (see Chapters 8 and 9).

Egypt was passing through a very unstable period, and unusual movements of fleets and armies reflected this uncertainty. Egyptian fleets, as well as Phoenician fleets in the pay of the black Nubian rulers of Egypt, were traversing the Mediterranean (the Phoenicians moving even into the North Atlantic to points as far north as Cornwall in the quest for supplies of tin). Metal supplies had been severely curtailed by the Assyrian control and

blockade of Asian sea routes, and they were sorely needed for the weaponry of the Nubian-Egyptian armies.²⁸ Ships on this metal run, moving in the vicinity of the North African coast, could very easily have been caught in a storm and swept off-course by the North Atlantic currents. Such an accident (which has happened in many documented instances) could account for the startling appearance in the Olmec heartland of Negroes with elements of Egyptian culture. One branch of the North Equatorial current would have taken them from the North African or West African coast right into the Gulf of Mexico. (See map of Atlantic currents, Plate 10.)

But what impact could a boatload or even a fleet of Negro-Egyptians have had on the Gulf of Mexico? These men would have been, in numerical terms, a drop of water in the human ocean of Mexico. It is estimated that the populations surrounding La Venta must have been quite substantial, at the time of Negro-Egyptian contact, to have made the building of this great ritual center possible. The first Egyptian-type pyramid, which appears at La Venta in this period, is 240 by 420 feet at the base and 110 feet high. To construct temple platforms, burial chambers and all, took 800,000 man-hours and involved a labor force of at least 18,000.²⁹ This does not include administrators and priests. How could a score or even a hundred shipwrecked mariners from the Old World have a significant culture-transforming effect on so many people? This argument, advanced by some antidiffusionists, who contend that a few aliens cannot, without military power, significantly affect a native population of substantial size, is pure nonsense. Cabello de Balboa cites a group of seventeen Negroes shipwrecked in Ecuador in the early sixteenth century who in short order became governors of an entire province of American Indians.³⁰

The influence of Negro-Africans on Olmec culture (which we shall discuss in detail in subsequent chapters) was considerable. Even more profound was the impact of Olmec culture upon all future civilizations in Mesoamerica. As Michael Coe, the distinguished authority on Mexico, has pointed out, "There is not the slightest doubt that all later civilizations in Mesoamerica, whether Mexican or Maya, rest ultimately on an Olmec base."³¹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For a historical outline of incidents dramatized in the opening pages of this chapter, see Arthur James Weise, *Discoveries of America to 1525*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1884, pp. 225-228.
2. Lopez de Gomara, *Historia de Mexico*, Anvers, 1554.
3. F. A. MacNutt (ed. and trans.), *De Orbo Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr d'Anghera*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.
4. Alexander von Wuthenau, *The Art of Terracotta Pottery in Pre-Columbian Central and South America*, New York, Crown Publishers, 1969, p. 167.
5. Alphonse de Quatrefages, *The Human Species*, New York, Appleton, 1905, p. 200.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.
7. M. Orozco y Berra, *Historia antigua y de la conquista de México*, Mexico, G. A. Esteva, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 109.
8. See note 4 above. An earlier edition in German was published by Holle Verlag, Baden-Baden, 1965.
9. Von Wuthenau, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
10. Herbert Baker, "Commentary: Section III," in Riley, Kelley, Pennington and Rands (eds.), *Man Across the Sea*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1971, p. 438.
11. Ibn Fadl Allah al Omari, *Masalik el Absar fir Mamalik el Amsar*, trans. Gaudefroy, Paris, 1927, pp. 61-63. See also Mohammed Habibullah's translation from the Arabic text quoted in Basil Davidson, *The Lost Cities of Africa*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1970 (revised edition), pp. 74, 75, and J. Spencer Trimingham's version of the Abubakari expedition in *A History of Islam in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 67.
12. Harold Lawrence, "African Explorers in the New World," *The Crisis*, 25, June-July 1962, pp. 321-332. Heritage Program Reprint, p. 11.
13. Von Wuthenau, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 96. Nualpilli is mentioned in the Florentine Codex.

- R. G. Granados quotes the listing in the register of Mexican antiquities of the Archivo de Indios. See representation on page 168 of von Wuthenau and Plate 18 of this volume.
15. James Bailey, *The God-Kings and Titans*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973, p. 189.
 16. Leo Wiener, *Africa and the Discovery of America*, Philadelphia, Innes and Sons, 1920-1922, Vols. 1-3.
 17. M.D.W. Jeffreys, "Arabs Discover America before Columbus," *The Muslim's Digest*, June 1953, p. 69. In this article Jeffreys remarks: "The colocasia, the yam, the Negro and the non-barking dog are all West African *items*, and if these are found in the Americas before Columbus *someone* must have taken them there before him." (Italics added.)
 18. Philip Drucker, Robert F. Heizer and Robert J. Squier, "Radio-carbon Dates from La Venta, Tabasco," *Science*, 126, July 12, 1957, pp. 72-73.
 19. Michael Coe, *Mexico*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1962, p. 88.
 20. Constance Irwin, *Fair Gods and Stone Faces*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1963, p. 166.
 21. There are hundreds of giant basalt balls, almost perfectly spherical, to be found in Central and South America. One of these, in Costa Rica (weighing sixteen tons), is reproduced in Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
 22. Coe, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
 23. Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
 24. Frederick Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.
 25. Alexander von Wuthenau, *Unexpected Faces in Ancient America*, New York, Crown Publishers, 1975, p. 136.
 26. *The Washington Post*, February 29, 1975, p. A17 (Associated Press report). See also Ivan Van Sertima, "Archaeology's Discovery of an African Presence in America," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1975, Op-Ed page, p. 41.
 27. E. A. Hooton, *Apes, Men and Morons*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937, p. 183.
 28. For details of alliances and maritime commerce of the period,

see Chapter 8 of this volume. For Negro mariners and capabilities for ocean voyages, see Chapter 4.

29. Coe, op. cit., p. 88.

30. Stephen Jett in Riley et al. (eds.), op. cit., p. 16. Jett gives as his source for this statement M. Cabello de Balboa, *Obras*, Vol. 1, Quito, Editorial Ecuatoriana, 1945, p. 133.

31. Coe, op. cit.