



CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

HIS LIFE AND DISCOVERIES

Mario Di Giovanni

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PROJECT

Preface

The life and voyages of Christopher Columbus are better documented than those of any other great navigator of his period. Many contemporaries who knew him personally and had the literary ability to portray his life and accomplishments wrote about him in great detail.

The first chronicler to report on Columbus was the Italian Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire), born in 1456 in Lombardy in the town of Anghiera on the south shore of Lake Maggiore. One of the most learned men of his age, he was the true Renaissance man. At the age of thirty he was invited by the Spanish ambassador in Rome to join the faculty at Salamanca and given the task of instructing the scions of the royal household. He was presented to the Sovereigns at Saragossa during the war with Granada and as a member of the military retinue kept a record, through his letter writing, of many campaigns against the Moors. He was sent as ambassador extraordinary by Ferdinand and Isabella to the sultan of Egypt to settle a very delicate problem: the sultan had threatened to put all Christians in his realm to death unless Spain put an end to the war with Granada. He discharged his duties with great ability and through clever diplomacy persuaded the sultan to retract his ultimatum.

Peter Martyr was with the court at Barcelona in April 1493, when Columbus returned from his first voyage to the New

World. He was able to obtain firsthand accounts from the Admiral and his shipmates—a practice he followed whenever the opportunity presented itself. Through these interviews, Martyr eventually wrote a history of the discoveries even though he himself never sailed on any of the voyages. His principal work is an account of the discoveries of the New World in eight parts, each containing ten chapters written in Latin but later translated into various languages. In many ways Peter Martyr may be considered the first news reporter in history, because in letters to distinguished contemporaries, he related current occurrences of the times. He was the Court's secretary and historian.

In one of his letters from Barcelona, dated May 1, 1493, and addressed to Count Borromeo, he gave the first brief account of Columbus's momentous discovery:

Within these last few days, a certain Christopher Columbus has arrived from the Western antipodes; a man of Liguria whom my Sovereigns reluctantly entrusted with three ships to reach that region, for they thought that what he said was fabulous. He has returned and brought specimens of many precious things, but particularly gold, which those countries naturally produce.¹

Martyr's letters have the timely immediacy of a news wire to a metropolitan newspaper. In another letter to Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, dated September 13, 1493, he gave a more detailed account of the voyage:

The wonders of this terrestrial globe, around which the sun makes a circuit in the space of four and twenty hours, have until our time, as you are well aware, been known only in regard to one hemisphere, merely from the Golden Chersonese (the Malay Pen-

insula) to our Spanish Gades (Cádiz). The rest has been given up as unknown by cosmographers and if any mention of it has been made, it has been slight and dubious. But now, Oh blessed enterprise! Under the auspices of our Sovereigns, what has hitherto lain hidden since the first origin of things, has at length been developed. The thing has thus occurred—attend illustrious Prince! A certain Christopher Columbus, a Ligurian, dispatched to those regions with three vessels by my Sovereigns, pursuing the western sun five thousand miles above Gades, achieved his way to the antipodes. Three and thirty successive days they navigated with nought but sky and water. At length from the masthead of the largest vessel in which Columbus sailed, those on the lookout proclaimed the sight of land. He coasted along six islands one of them, as all his followers declare beguiled perchance by the novelty of the scene, is larger than Spain.²

Peter Martyr was such an avid letter writer that a collection of them made up thirty-eight books, each containing the letters of one year. Published in 1530, they are of great historical interest because of their spontaneity and candor; however, for the same reasons, they suffer at times from inaccuracies and exaggerations. In 1524 he was appointed to the Counsel of the Indies and died in 1526 in Valladolid, having served the Spanish royalty for thirty-eight years.

One of the most important sources of information on the life of the discoverer of America is the biography written by his son, Ferdinand Columbus. This has been praised by Benjamin Keen as a “moving personal document that vividly recreates the moral and intellectual atmosphere of Columbus’s world and the swirling passions of which he was the center.”³

Ferdinand Columbus was born in August or September of 1488 in Córdoba, as a result of a love affair that the thirty-seven-year-old Columbus had with a young woman of Córdoba, Beatriz Enríquez de Arana. He lived the first few years of his life with his mother in Córdoba but was appointed a page to the king's son, Juan, after Columbus's first voyage. In May 1502, the boy accompanied his father on his fourth voyage: an adventurous, albeit disastrous, voyage that lasted two years and six months; he thus gained much experience and knowledge on all aspects of sailing. In 1509 he accompanied his older brother, Diego, to Hispaniola, but returned to Spain a few months later to resume his scholarly pursuits. He accompanied Emperor Charles V to Italy, Flanders, and Germany and later traveled all over Europe and to parts of Africa and Asia. Through his travels, he acquired much learning in geography, navigation, and natural history.

Very fond of books, he began to collect them at a rapid rate and formed a library of nearly twenty thousand books that he stored in a portion of the house he had built near the Guadalquivir River in Seville. Today this library, reduced to two thousand of Ferdinand's own books, is the renowned Biblioteca Colombina.

Ferdinand wrote the biography of his father during the last years of his life. He died in 1539 and because he had never married, he left the manuscript to Don Diego's widow, Doña María de Toledo. Eventually, the manuscript passed into the hands of her "playboy" son, Don Luis, who was hard-pressed for cash, sold it to the Genoese physician Baliano de Fornari. The work was translated into Italian by Alfonso Ulloa, an Italian of Spanish birth, and published in 1571. Unfortunately, the original Spanish manuscript was lost and never found. There is no doubt that some meaning and accuracy of detail have been lost in the translation, and there is evidence that Ulloa injected

some personal conclusions to the narrative. However, in any translation of such magnitude, liberties are taken with idiomatic expressions that may modify the meaning of the original text. We thus face the anomaly of a Spanish manuscript translated first into Italian, then again into Spanish, English, and other foreign languages and that may have lost the spirit and flavor of the original.

In the present volume, I have quoted liberally from Ferdinand's biography of his father in Benjamin Keen's translation, entitled *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by His Son Ferdinand* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959).

Another contemporary who made use of Ferdinand's original manuscript was Bartolomé de Las Casas in his well-documented *Historia de las Indias* (Madrid, 1875–76). Besides the manuscript, he also had access to the journals and letters of Columbus and to those written by Christopher's brother, Don Bartolomé. He had a writing style which was perhaps even more vivid than that of the great explorer himself. De Las Casas's father had gone to Hispaniola with Columbus on his second voyage and had returned to Seville in 1498. Aroused by his father's account of the New World, Bartolomé, at the age of twenty-eight, went to Hispaniola in 1502 and witnessed Ovando's cruel treatment of the Indians. His zeal in the cause of the Indians, evidenced by his famous treatise of denunciation known as the "Brevisima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias," lasted a lifetime and earned him the title of "the Apostle of the Indies."

Las Casas joined the Dominican order in 1510 and became a priest, the first to be ordained in the New World. Eventually, he became bishop of Chiapas, and lived in his newly conquered territory of Mexico from 1544 to 1547, after which he returned to Spain and resigned his bishopric in 1550. His *Historia de las*

Indias, consisting of three volumes, was started in 1527 and completed in 1559, when Las Casas was eighty-five years of age. It was not published, however, until 1875–76, because it described in detail the extremely cruel treatment of the Indians at the hands of the conquering Spaniards. A note written in Las Casas's handwriting begs the College of the Order of Preachers of St. Gregorio in Valladolid, to whom he left the first two volumes, not to let any secular person read his books until forty years after his death. The *Historia* is notable because it covers the history of Spanish discoveries from 1492 to 1520, encompassing not only Columbus's voyages but the aftermath of his discoveries and colonization, as actually seen and experienced by the author.

The source of some of the material in my book has been obtained from Las Casas's abstracts of the first and third voyages of Columbus translated by Milton Anastos and Samuel Eliot Morison for the Heritage Club Book, *Journals and Other Documents on the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1963).

Another chronicler who, like Las Casas, served many years in the New World was Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, commonly known as Oviedo. Born in Madrid in 1478, he was appointed at the age of twelve as one of the pages to the king's son, Juan. He was there as a member of the court when Columbus marched in his triumphant procession with the Indians from the discovered lands. King Ferdinand sent him to the Indies in 1513, where he served in various capacities: first as superintendent of the gold foundries and later, in 1535, as "Alcalde" (chief official) of the fortress of Santo Domingo in Hispaniola. He served in the colonies for thirty-four years, during which time he wrote several important works, the most important being the chronicle of Indies: *Historia General y Natural de Las Indias* (Salamanca,

1547). A monumental work, this history consists of fifty books, divided into three parts, of which only the first part of twenty books was ever printed. It is of particular importance because of his description of the customs of the inhabitants and of the fauna and flora of the New World, all illustrated with his own sketches. It also was instrumental in goading Ferdinand to complete his father's biography. Oviedo's startling claim, in Chapter 3 of Book 2, that the Indies already had belonged to Spain before Columbus's discovery, had to be countered. Thus, in Chapter 10 of his biography, Ferdinand challenges Oviedo's claim by stating:

I believe that Oviedo is led astray by faulty information, by the frailty of old age, or by blind prejudice when he argues that the story refers to the Indies that we possess today and not to the Azores.⁴

Except for this event relating to pre-Columbian visitors, Oviedo speaks well of Columbus both of his ability as a navigator and of his education and personality. In defense of Columbus when he was brought back in chains following Bobadilla's excursion, Oviedo wrote that to succeed in Hispaniola a governor had to have been "angelic indeed and superhuman." He died in Valladolid in 1557 at the age of seventy-nine.

A dear friend and sympathetic confidant with whom Columbus found much solace in his periods of despair was Andrés Bernáldez, curate of the town of Los Palacios from 1488 to 1513 and chaplain to Diego Deza, archbishop of Seville. Immediately following his second voyage, while waiting for an invitation from Sovereigns to pay his respects, Columbus stayed in the Bernáldez home. This gave Bernáldez an opportunity to talk with the Admiral about his recent voyage, the Cuban experience and the wonders of the New World. When Columbus left the Bernáldez

household in 1496, after a five- to six-week stay, to meet with the Sovereigns who at that time were holding court at Almazan in the Upper Douro, north of Madrid, he entrusted the journals of the second voyage and other documents to Bernáldez, who found them useful for the *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, which he was writing at the time. This unpublished manuscript is a highly reliable narrative of the voyages and life of Columbus as it contains many intimate details about the Admiral's experiences in the Indies. On this particular visit the Admiral had just returned from his second voyage and was accompanied by the retinue of Indians with parrots, gold jewelry, and priceless examples of Taino art. His account of the Admiral's sailing along the southern coast of Cuba is more detailed and more accurate than that of any other historian.

Additional contemporary information was disclosed through the correspondence of the voyagers themselves who shared their adventurous experiences with friends and noblemen. Most important of all the narratives, of course, are Columbus's journals of the first voyage, recently translated into English by Robert H. Fuson (*The Log of Christopher Columbus*, 1987) from which I quote extensively. Additional information is gleaned from the many letters he wrote to the Sovereigns, the most outstanding of which was the letter of 1493 known as the "Epistola de Insulis Nuper Inventis," reproduced in full in the present book. Dr. Chanca's letter, Michele de Cuneo's mirthful narrative, and the Scillacio tract constitute the best eyewitness information available for the second voyage. Bernáldez's and Ferdinand's narratives give a unique account of the second voyage, but it is secondhand information even though it was provided by the Admiral himself. Unfortunately, there is no existing journal written by Columbus on his second voyage.

On the third voyage, we have an abstract of Columbus's journal made by Las Casas, Columbus's "Letter to the Sovereigns" of October 18, 1498, and his letter to Doña Juana de Torres of October 1500. Las Casas's *Historia* lends additional coverage.

The Royal Instructions of March 14, 1502, the Roster and Payroll with the list of ships, Columbus's famous "Lettera Rarissima", and the narrative of Diego Méndez, together with Ferdinand's account of the voyage, are the most important sources for the fourth voyage.

By far the most exhaustive collection of documents on the life and voyages of Christopher Columbus is the monumental collection authorized by the Italian government for the fourth centennial of the discovery of America. A royal commission was appointed and delegated to locate all extant documents on the life and discoveries of Christopher Columbus and to collect them for future reference. The result of this investigation is the *Raccolta di Documenti e Studi pubblicati dalla R. Commissione Colombiana pel Quarto Centenario della Scoperta dell'America* (Rome, 1892–96). Edited by Cesare De Lollis, it consists of six parts divided into fourteen volumes and a supplement, and is available for research at Biblioteca Nazionale in Rome.

Another important collection of Columbian documents, this one motivated by the third centennial of the discovery of America, was prepared by Martín Fernández de Navarrete, secretary of the Spanish Royal Academy of History under the auspices of the Spanish government. It is entitled *Colección de los Viages y Descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los Españoles*, Vols. I–III (Madrid, 1825–29). Printed at about the time that Washington Irving was in Europe, it aroused enough curiosity in the famous American

writer that he decided to write a book on Columbus based on some aspects of the data gathered by Navarrete.

With the Spaniard's encouragements, Irving later published a book entitled *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (London, 1828), which at that time was the most complete and authoritative work of its kind in America. It remained for the distinguished historian Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison, with his two-volume biography of Columbus entitled *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1942), to reawaken in the American public an interest in the life and voyages of the great Genoese navigator. His one-volume edition, which lacked the valuable copious notes of the two-volume edition, was a best seller and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for biography. Admiral Morison, an accomplished sailor in his own right, organized the Harvard Columbus Expedition consisting of the barkentine *Capitana* and the ketch *Mary Otis*, which in 1939–40 crossed the Atlantic from New England to Lisbon via the Azores, visited Huelva, Palos, Cádiz, Porto Santo, Madeira, and Grand Canary and jumped off Comera to follow as closely as possible the track of Columbus's third voyage. Later they continued sailing to many of the islands that Columbus had visited in the first, second, and third voyages. With this wealth of related nautical experience, Morison's appraisal of Columbus's skills as a seaman speaks volumes:

*He had his faults and his defects, but they were largely the defects of the qualities that made him great....But there was no flaw, no dark side for the most outstanding and essential of all his qualities—his seamanship.*⁵

Additionally, the exploratory voyages that Morison made on his own throughout the Caribbean allowed him to identify nearly all anchorages and landfalls that Columbus made in his four voyages. We are also indebted to Admiral Morison for the translation into English of many documents and journals heretofore available only in Spanish and Italian in his *Journals and Other Documents on the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (op. cit.), from which I have quoted liberally in this book.

I have attempted to bring to the attention of the reader many of the important documents identifying Christopher Columbus as the discoverer of the New World and establishing conclusively his national origin; yet, the scholarly Salvador de Madariaga in his controversial *Christopher Columbus* dares to ask:

Who is this mysterious man whose single spirit changed the course of history, deflected a mighty nation from its natural path, doubled the size of man's physical world, widened his mental horizon beyond the wildest expectations of the age, created, in fact, the setting for that bold, humanistic, conception, lured by which man, the super-monkey, has since then dreamt himself to be an undergod? ... Mystery surrounds him. Pride stiffens him up. A sense of mission entrusted to him from on high drives him. No one knows who he is, where he comes from, what he actually wishes to do.⁶

There were other skeptics such as Henry Vignaud, *Histoire critique de la grande entreprise de Christophe Colomb* (Paris: H. Water, 1911); and more recently Simon Wiesenthal in his *Sails of Hope: The Secret Mission of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Christopher Columbus Publishing, 1979) proposes that wealthy and influential Spanish Jews sent Columbus forth to find a new homeland for their brothers who had been chased out of Spain.

Their expectation was that Columbus might find the lost tribe of Israel in India or China.

The present book is in actuality not only a detailed account of the life and travels of Columbus—there are already many books on Columbus—but an attempt to describe the drama of an age that changed the course of the world and in which Columbus played a very important part. Great events are not caused by the efforts of a single individual. They are the result of less important but related events brought about through the years by individuals, technological advances, and socio-political conditions that reach fruition at a propitious time. Part I of this book consisting of the first five chapters deals exclusively with these events. I review those theories regarding pre-Columbian visitors to the Americas, the ancient theories and observations by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, and the geographical concepts of Ptolemy and Strabo. Progress stood still through the millennium of the Dark Ages. Marco Polo revived the spirit of discovery; the Renaissance, which emphasized the development of man's natural gifts and the acquisition of knowledge about the physical world, created the atmosphere that culminated in the discovery of America. The learned men of that period—Roger Bacon, Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, and Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli—all had great influence on Columbus.

Improvements in sailing ships and navigational charts, and the invention of the magnetic compass and quadrant, encouraged oceanic sailing and exploration and prompted the Portuguese under the auspices of Prince Henry the Navigator to venture down the west coast of Africa. From 1419 to 1456, the Portuguese established a foothold on the Atlantic islands of the Azores and the Madeiras to the Rio Grande in Africa, south of the Cape Verde Islands. By 1487, Bartolomeu Dias had rounded the Cape of Good Hope.

Navigators had become increasingly more confident in their skills when Columbus made a proposal to King John II of Portugal for a western trip to the Indies, but was refused because of the previous success of Diaz. In Spain, Columbus found a more sympathetic ear in Queen Isabella, but the war with Granada had to take priority over any oceanic exploration. After the Moors' defeat, and with the various sections of the country united under one flag (with the exception of Navarre), the Catholic monarchs could start playing a role more fitting to their newly acquired status as a world power. Columbus's plan of exploration was finally accepted and he sailed into history.

This book was written in response to a concerted demand by many individuals who attended at least one of the approximately one hundred lectures I delivered in the United States to civic groups and various institutions of learning during 1970–80. The audiences confessed freely that they knew very little about Christopher Columbus, that they had learned much from the lectures and wondered why Columbus was such a famous unknown.

It is my opinion that historians, particularly those who wrote their histories before 1950, are to blame for the ignorance generally found in America regarding Columbus. Witness, for example, Charles A. Beard, who, in his *A Basic History of the United States*, begins Chapter I with the heading, "English Territorial Claims and Territorial Beginnings," completely disregarding Columbus and the Spanish occupations in the United States before the English settlements of Virginia.

It is my fond hope my *Christopher Columbus: His Life and Discoveries*, will be a primer for the delight and edification of all Americans in anticipation of the fifth centennial of the discovery of America.

—Mario Di Giovanni
Pacific Palisades, California

Chapter One

THE AMERICAN ABORIGINES

When Christopher Columbus landed on the island of Guanahani (San Salvador) in the Bahamas on October 12, 1492, he met natives with perhaps thirty thousand years of culture behind them. In his journal Columbus reported:

All go as naked as their mothers bore them, and the women also although I did not see more than one very young girl. All those that I saw were young people, none of whom was more than thirty years old. They are very well-built people, with handsome bodies and very fine faces; though their appearance is marred somewhat by very broad heads and foreheads, more so than I have ever seen in any other race. Their eyes are large and very pretty and their skin is the color of Canary islanders or of the sunburned peasants, not at all black as would be expected because we are on the east-west line with Hierro in the Canaries... Many of the natives paint their faces; others paint their whole bodies; some only eyes and nose.¹

Columbus erroneously assumed that he had reached the outer islands of Japan (Cipango), yet ironically he was describing the physiognomy of people who had originally come from

Asia perhaps twelve thousand to thirty-five thousand years earlier. Some archaeologists believe even in an earlier arrival of the first Americans and cite as evidence the skull of the Del Mar Man, found in a California coastal cliff and now in view at the San Diego Museum of Man. A new dating technique that analyzes amino acid changes shows the skull's age to be forty-eight thousand years old. Many artifacts discovered in America—both North and South—and verified by carbon-14 tests, have proven that man existed on this continent at least twelve thousand years ago. While scholars may disagree on the time of his appearance on the American continent, they all agree that the migration to America occurred by way of a land bridge that is now the Bering Strait. Who were these early inhabitants? It is agreed that the ancestors of the American Indians came from Asia, bearing with them the Mongolian traits such as skin of a copper color; straight black, coarse hair; and dark eyes and wide cheekbones.

The bulk of the early migration occurred during the last stages of the Pleistocene Glaciation, although carbon-14 tests suggest early-man sites in the Americas even before the end of the Ice Age. The northern half of North America lay beneath ice sheets two miles thick extending south to Kentucky. The ice sheets held so much water that ocean levels dropped several hundred feet, exposing continental shelves that in time became grasslands and forests. Mammoths and mastodons eventually grazed and died on these lands. The gap between Alaska and Siberia became an undulating plain one thousand miles wide, forming a land bridge for the migration of man and beast. Little or no moisture fell on this part of the Arctic, including the northern part of the Yukon, so that ice did not cover this area that became, by contrast, a huge grass-covered prairie called Beringia. From Beringia, many may have ventured south through an ice-free corridor along the

eastern slope of the Rockies that existed at various periods of the Ice Age. This corridor separated the Cordilleran Ice Sheet on the Pacific Coast from the enormous Laurentide Ice Sheet that covered the northernmost section of North America to the Atlantic Ocean. It is also possible that many migrants ventured south along the Pacific Coast. Within a period of four thousand years, the migration of these Mongolian peoples had advanced to what is now Central America and by 9000 B.C. had reached the tip of South America.

At the time of Columbus's arrival in 1492, the American Indians in great part were still living in a Neolithic Age. They had invented polished stone tools but had not developed agriculture to the level practiced in the Old World. They did not cultivate cereals, nor had they begun to domesticate animals, except perhaps for the dog. Europeans introduced cattle, horses, and other domesticated animals. Some of the native Indians, however, particularly in Mexico and in regions of South America, had advanced beyond the Neolithic Age. These higher civilizations emerged nearly two thousand years ago in the Andean region of South America and in the highlands of Central America and Mexico. Here the Indians produced textiles, pottery, and magnificent ornaments of gold, silver, and copper; their agriculture produced corn (maize), potatoes, and quinoa, a grain resembling rice. Social organizations were sophisticated with standing armies, priest emperors, schools, courts, and systemized religions. In Mexico, specifically Yucatan, the Indians used accurate calendars based on astronomical observations and hieroglyphic writing.

The Aztecs in Mexico, the Incas in Peru, and the Mayas in the intervening area of Yucatan attained the highest degree of culture. The Mayas are believed to have developed probably the

optimal aboriginal civilization in the Western Hemisphere, although the Aztecs surpassed them in military proficiency and the Incas in the arts of weaving and dyeing. These civilizations had reached their apex before the Spanish Conquest. Simpler cultures such as the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest and the mound builders in the Mississippi Valley existed in the United States.

Specialized local cultures existed as well in the northeastern United States and Canada, in Alaska, and to a still lesser degree, in California. Yet, most North American Indians lived, at the time of Columbus's arrival, as they had lived in 10,000 B.C., a primitive cultural life built around hunting and fishing. The coming of the Spaniards and other Europeans quickly ended that way of life.

Chapter Two

THE PRE-COLUMBIAN VISITORS

The discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492 was such a momentous event that many have tried to belittle it by claiming prior landfalls on the new continent. There is no doubt that many lost sailors chanced to land on the American shores before Columbus. No intelligent person will dispute that. After all, the American continent stretching from the North to the South Poles constitutes both a barrier and a haven to anyone sailing westward or eastward. A landfall, however, does not a discovery make. It was Columbus who generated an immediate and universal interest in his discovery and changed the course of history. Previous “discoveries” were just footprints in the sands that time erased. Nevertheless, such landfalls, some mythical, others merely hypothetical, and others completely without merit, need to be mentioned, if for no other reason than to be thorough in our methods.

THE PHOENICIAN VOYAGE, 531 B.C.

The greatest navigators of the ancient world were the Phoenicians, who lived in the coastal area of modern Lebanon, Israel, and Syria.

The Phoenicians knew every corner of the Mediterranean Sea one thousand years before Christ was born. Their skilled sailors ventured beyond the Strait of Gibraltar, reaching the farthest coasts of Western Europe. As early as 1130 B.C. they sailed up the coast of Spain, founding the city of Cádiz. They sailed north to England and as far south as the tip of Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope and north again to the Gulf of Aden; a feat that was not repeated until 1498 by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. It is possible that the Phoenicians reached America as well.

A theory that seafarers from the Mediterranean city of Sidon in Phoenicia landed on the coast of Brazil 2,023 years before Columbus has been advanced by some researchers, based on the discovery of a stone on the banks of the Paraíba River. In 1976, a team of scientists from Brandeis University examined the message carved on it and declared it of Sidonian derivation. The carving told of the venturesome voyage of ten Sidonian ships that circumnavigated Africa for two years to round Africa when they became separated. One of the ships with twelve men and three women aboard eventually made landfall on the coast of Brazil, leaving behind them the Sidonian tablet.

VISITORS FROM THE OLD WORLD

In recent years, archaeologists have also gathered a wealth of historical artifacts in Central and South America showing that many visitors from the Old World had landed in the Americas centuries before Columbus. Thus, from Guatemala has come an incense burner with the sculptured head of a man whose high-crowned nose, classically sculptured beard, and bemused, strangely serene expression decidedly identified him as a Semitic. This head was sculpted by Maya Indians during the period of

300–600 A.D. Even some sculptured heads of Negroes have been found in Central America predating Columbian times.

There are also indications that the Greeks and Romans visited America. In 1961 archaeologists discovered a sculpted head from about 200 A.D., obviously Roman in origin, in a pyramid at Calixtlahuaca, Mexico. Iron artifacts and bronze cups similar to cups from the ruins of Pompeii have also aroused the curiosity of archaeologists, because the two metals had not yet been developed by the Stone Age Indians. It should be noted that the ships of the Roman period were as heavy as one thousand tons—ten times the size of Columbus's Santa Maria and fully capable of crossing the Atlantic.

ORIENTAL VISITORS

The Chinese also claim pre-Columbian visits to the West Coast of North America. Chinese-style stone anchors were found off of the California coast in 1976. The anchors, one found in shallow waters near the Palos Verdes Peninsula in Los Angeles County and another near Cape Mendocino in northern California, are about three thousand years old and Asian in origin. A UCLA anthropologist said at the time of the discovery that the anchors were not produced by California Indians. Chinese historian Fang Zhonapu identified them as being of Chinese origin, and this claim was substantiated by James R. Moriarty of the University of San Diego. Fang also claims that the first explorer of the American continent was a Buddhist monk named Huishen who sailed off to spread Buddhism in the year 452 and returned in 499 with an astonishing tale of a seven-thousand-mile voyage to a land called Fusang. By his description, this must have been Mexico. He described the cactus-like agave plant with its spiny

margined leaves and flowers in tall spreading panicles whose fibers the Indians used for making garments.

Fang, a maritime historian, affirms that China had the naval technology and equipment to accomplish long oceanic voyages in ancient times. He states further that in the first century A.D., the Chinese already knew how to use the stern post rudder to keep ships on course. In the third century, Chinese sailors were able to calculate sailing speeds and the length of voyages. In the fifth century, there were frequent seaborne exchanges of envoys between China and other countries. So it would have been quite possible for Huishen to cross the Pacific in the fifth century and land in Mexico. China also had the ships to undertake long voyages. Fang notes that in the third century the kingdom of Emperor Wu had a navy of five thousand ships, the largest with several decks and enough berths for three thousand passengers! Voyages to the Philippines and other South China Sea ports were commonplace even before the birth of Christ. But the Chinese stone anchors found recently on the California coast are presumed to be three thousand years old. Nevertheless, because they represent an isolated case, it would be foolish to assume that there was friendly intercourse between China and the Americas during 1000 B.C.

The vast Pacific, it seems, was no barrier to sailors from the Japanese Islands either. Archaeologists have found five-thousand-year-old Japanese pottery in Ecuador, suggesting that both China and Japan had reached the shores of the American continent.

THE CELT MIGRATION

In his book *America B.C.* Barry Fell has advanced the theory that perhaps five hundred years before Christ, parts of North America were settled by Celts from Portugal. They clustered in

Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and in New York's Hudson Valley, where they built crude stone chambers that were used for religious ceremonies and for taking sun-sightings. These sun worshipers intermarried with the Algonquin Indians, and after many generations their identity was lost. The stone chambers—beehive-shaped structures—can still be found in the mountainous New England countryside. The origin of the chambers is surmised from the inscriptions found in the mounds surrounding the chambers; however, their dating is neither authentic nor reliable.

JEWISH SETTLEMENT AND POLISH CLAIMANTS

An additional artifact found in the American continent that has aroused the curiosity of archaeologists is the tombstone with Hebrew inscriptions and dated at about 200 A.D. It was found in the 1880s together with eight skeletons in a burial mound at Bat Creek, Tennessee. According to some Jewish proponents, this is proof of the presence on the American continent of the mythical lost tribe of Israel, which Columbus had been instructed to find by Spanish converts. This claim was made by Simon Wiesenthal in his book *Sails of Hope: The Secret Mission of Christopher Columbus* (New York: MacMillan, 1979).

Polish-Americans have attributed the discovery of America to Scolvus, whom they call Jan of Kolm, who supposedly came to America in 1476 in search of the Northwest Passage. There is absolutely no proof of his three voyages undertaken in the company of the Danish pirates Pining and Pothurst.

THE ST. BRENDAN LEGEND, 500–600 A.D.

Among the pre-Columbian explorers of the New World, no name is more popular or controversial than that of Ireland's

St. Brendan. His legend has been kept alive to this day in the form of a Christian “imram.” Early Irish literature, both pagan and Christian, abounds in “imrama,” as these Irish sagas are called. They deal primarily with the marvels and miracles of ocean voyages, and St. Brendan’s is the most popular. Called “*Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*” (Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot), it describes Saint Brendan’s legendary voyage to “*Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum*” (the Promised Land of the Saints), somewhere beyond the far reaches of the Western Atlantic. Sailing in a “currash,” a skin-covered boat very common in those days, and accompanied by seventeen monks, St. Brendan left Ireland and headed northward, then westward. The voyage lasted seven years and introduced the monks to such wonders as demons who hurled fire upon them, a floating crystal column, and a sea creature as great as an island. Eventually, the adventurous crew reached the Promised Land, a huge, lush island divided by a mighty river. It was full of trees bearing ripe apples. They lived on this island that knew no night for forty days.

In exploring the island, they reached the mighty river that they hesitated to cross. A youth appeared, called each monk by name, kissed him, and sang the eighty-fourth Psalm. He informed them that this island was the place God left to them and their successors to own and inhabit until the end of the persecution of the Christians. He cautioned them not to explore any further but to return home laden with fruits and precious stones of the island.

Most of the events in the “*Navigatio*” abound in fantasies and marvels. More remarkable is the fact that St. Brendan was over seventy years old when he started his voyage in the middle of the sixth century. The significance of the voyage lies in the

influence that it had on the cartographers and navigators of later periods. These mapmakers began to include the St. Brendan Isles in the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, not knowing exactly at what latitude. Yet, subsequently some Irish writers wrote that St. Brendan journeyed as far north as Newfoundland and as far south as the West Indies and Mexico. Columbus, like other navigators, believed in the existence of the St. Brendan Isles. In fact, he makes reference to St. Brendan in the journal of his first voyage. As for the seafaring saint's presumed landfall on the New World, it is very doubtful that there was one at all. To date, not a single Irish artifact has been unearthed by archaeologists to substantiate it.

MADOC AND THE WELSH SETTLEMENT

According to a narrative told in the southeastern part of the United States, Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd, a Welsh prince, reached the shores of Florida in 1170, 322 years before Columbus's first voyage to the "Indies." Very much impressed with what he saw, he returned to Wales, recruited many Welsh men and women, and sailed back to America with the purpose of starting a Welsh colony. A tablet commemorating the reputed landing place in Alabama has been erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution at Fort Morgan, Mobile Bay, bearing these words: "In memory of Prince Madoc, a Welsh explorer, who landed on the shores of Mobile Bay in 1170 and left behind with the Indians the Welsh language."

This was the second Madoc memorial erected in the United States. The first one was put up by the state of Tennessee. Centuries later came "reports" of the existence of a mysterious tribe of "Welsh Indians" who actually spoke Welsh. An expedition in

search of the reputed descendants of Madoc along the tributaries of the Missouri River ended a dismal failure.

THE NORSEMEN

All we know about the discovery of America by Norsemen is gathered from two important Norse sagas written down from oral sources around 1250 A.D. These sagas recount the travels of Eric the Red, father of Leif Ericson, who, to escape a manslaughter conviction in Norway, fled to Iceland and then went further west to a peninsula that he named “Greenland” to encourage settlement there. He returned to Iceland the next summer, in 985 A.D., to extol the advantages of settling in Greenland and was able to convince twelve shiploads of Icelanders to join him. The new immigrants set up farming and hunting communities; but because Greenland has no timber—the harsh environment precluding the growth of trees—they were hampered in building permanent shelters.

In the meantime, Biarni Heriulfson, sailing from Iceland to Greenland to visit his father, missed the island and eventually sighted unknown lands farther to the southwest that had an abundance of timber. Realizing he had sailed too far, he picked up a southwest wind and reached his destination in Greenland, where he told the settlers of the large area of timberland he had seen. Perhaps it was for that reason that Leif Ericson, second son of Eric the Red, set out with a crew of thirty-five in the summer of 1001 A.D. on a voyage of exploration to the west. His first landing was on Baffin Island (Canada), which he called Helluland (country of flat stones). He set out again due south and landed first on a land he called Vinland.

Several more attempts were made to colonize Vinland, one specifically by Thorfince Karisevni, Leif’s brother-in-law, but the

harsh environment forced the colonists to return in the summer of 1013. Another expedition in 1014 by a trader, Thorvard and his wife, Freydis, Eric the Red's illegitimate daughter, ended in bloodshed because of dissension among the colonists and harassment by the natives (1014–15). This episode ended the attempts of the colonization by the Norsemen, and the American adventures were reduced to a flame that gradually lost its luster and faded by about 1350 A.D. Before the close of the century, however, the greatest patron of cosmography and discovery, Prince Henry the Navigator, was born in 1394. An age of exploration and discovery that was to change the history of the world had dawned. With its advent, Columbus would fulfill his mission.