

The Prolonged Discovery of America

Charles Verlinden

Christopher Columbus did not know, on October 12, 1492, that he had reached a new world. Rather he believed, along with his crew, that he had crossed the ocean separating western Europe from east Asia; or, at the very least, that they were nearing the rich lands described by Marco Polo, which the Genoan had read about and his crew knew of, at least by reputation. In short, Columbus's ideas about the land he had just reached were considerably more inexact than those that Fernão d'Ulmo – that is to say, the Flemish explorer Ferdinand Van Olmen, Commander-Grantee in the service of João II, who presided at Terceira des Açores – had flaunted before the King. Indeed d'Ulmo was to play a more important role in the history of Portuguese discoveries than did Prince Henry the Navigator himself. In 1487, the year in which the great Portuguese sovereign was deciding between three possible routes to the Indies, d'Ulmo (as he is named in a royal diploma, dated July 24, 1486), or de Olmos as he is called in Las Casas's *Historia de Indias*, had proposed to the King that he “*dar achada huûa grande ylha ou ylhas o terra firme per costa que se presume ser a ylha das Sete Cidades.*” His proposal was thus to undertake a voyage to the Antilles, where the cartographers of that time placed the Isle of the Seven Cities, and where d'Ulmo conjectured that a neighboring continent (*terra firme*) might be located. Columbus himself returned from his voyage five years later. In the meantime, d'Ulmo had perished, perhaps having reached this continent whose existence he – but not Columbus – had foreseen. As to the history of the discovery of America: even if we don't know whether d'Ulmo reached it, we do know that Columbus was unaware that he himself had.

In truth, 1992 might just as well be the year we celebrate the 990th anniversary of the discovery of America by the Norwegian Lief Erikson in 1002, although he too was unaware of having reached a new continent. And if one wanted to take the paradox one step further, it could even be said, and correctly so, that the initial discovery of

America was made by groups of people who had migrated eastward, from Asia through the Bering Strait, beginning somewhere between forty thousand and twenty five thousand years before our era.

This should sufficiently demonstrate that the first thing that must be clarified is the very idea of the "discovery" of America, and that what happened in 1492 was, at most, nothing more than the beginning of a process whose impact no one perceived, least of all Columbus himself. It is, of course, well known that in 1498, during his third voyage, Columbus spoke of seeing "another world" at the sight of the mouth of the Orénoque river. Yet during his fourth voyage he was once more in search of a passage through what, for him, was the leading edge of the Asian continent. In any case, the year 1492 marks little more than the beginning of a process, more than a century long, about which the discoverer could have no idea.

In truth, we can only begin to speak of the "discovery of America" from the moment that the circumference of the American continent takes form in the minds of the Europeans who were in contact with it. Of course, this discovery did not take place during the voyages of Columbus. During the first voyage he reached the Bahamas, Cuba, and Haiti; during the second, the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico; during the third, Trinidad and then the coast of Venezuela, where Columbus thought he had reached Paradise; during the fourth, Jamaica and the Lesser Antilles once more. Yet, even as he skirted the Central American coast, prey to innumerable difficulties, Columbus did not cease hoping that he would find a passage between the islands. This was during the period of 1502-1504, some ten years after the "discovery" of the first island. During all this time, very little attention had been paid to the papal donations that divided the ownership of the islands between Spain and Portugal, nor to the privileges accorded by the Catholic kings to their admirals. The American historian Henry Harrise has identified no fewer than eighty-five voyages, undertaken between 1492 and 1504, in the direction of what would eventually be understood to be the eastern coastline of a new continent. How, then, did the first European explorers visualize this "land" that had not yet been baptized with the name of America?

At about the time that Columbus was completing his third voyage, Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot), a Venetian born in Genoa who was in the service of Henry VII of England, was himself trying to reach the Asian Orient by westward navigation. Making land in Newfoundland, he believed, as Columbus had, that he had reached

the lands of the Great Khan of the Mongols, ignorant of the fact, as his compatriot Columbus had been, that the emperors of the Ming dynasty had chased the descendants of Genghis Khan out of China more than a century earlier. During his second voyage, Cabot may have reached Florida, although it is highly doubtful. More importantly, the financial consequences of this second voyage were so catastrophic that, for almost a century, the English altogether abandoned the exploration of the American east coast (although they, like Cabot himself, remained unaware of the fact that they had reached it). The Portuguese explorer Gaspar Corte Real, departing from the Azores, also reached Newfoundland in the year 1500. His voyage was one in a series of westward voyages carried out by Portuguese explorers leaving from the Azores. These voyages, because of their overly northwestern orientation, ended badly. The same unfortunate fate befell the explorations of all the brothers Corte Real, although they in fact reached Labrador, without of course realizing that it was part of the same geographical whole that was being explored at almost the same time by Andalusian sailors in Central America.

From 1499 to 1503, the Andalusians explored an area of the Caribbean Sea that was bounded by the continental coast, the Lesser Antilles and the most southerly area of the Greater Antilles. They did not enter the Gulf of Mexico (that was put off until later), and therefore it remained unknown. In 1499 and 1500, the Spaniards Ojeda and La Cosa, accompanied by the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci, set sail for the Americas. They were followed almost immediately by Pero Alonso Niño and Cristóbal Guerra, then by Vicente Yañez Pinzón, and finally Diego de Lepe. These explorers followed the northern coast of South America, from the mouth of the Amazon to the mouth of the Orénoque. Soon afterward, Rodrigo de Bástidas made it to the Panamanian isthmus. This area of the coast proved to be particularly inhospitable, offering little cause to tarry. Contacts with the natives were brief and usually hostile, except when it was a matter of purchasing local provisions (these purchases became necessary when the explorers exhausted all the supplies they had brought with them from Europe). However, Niño did manage to bring back from his voyage a considerable quantity of pearls, which, along with the desire to find a passage to Cipango, explains why other voyages followed. Pinzón passed the equator and reached Brazil; the Portuguese explorer Cabral would do the same soon after. Several Andalusians made more than one voyage.

During this entire period, however, there was no awareness on the part of these explorers that they were dealing with a new part of the world, far distant from the Asia that all of them were striving to reach as they skirted the northern coast of South America.

This hope was not shared by the Portuguese Cabral. In 1500, the year of Cabral's voyage, Vasco da Gama had already completed his circuitous journey to India. De Gama had followed a southeastern route, that is, around the Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean. Since the time of Bartolomeu Diaz, however, all the Portuguese voyages to southern Africa had been oriented in a rather westerly direction, so that when Cabral passed the Cape Verde Islands he headed straight for the Brazilian coast, making land in the current state of Bahia. From there, he continued on his southeastern route to India, as he had been instructed. Cabral did not know whether the land he had reached was an island or part of a continent. In any case, none of these navigators was aware of its connection to other points of land that *we* know to be part of the American continent. In 1501–1502, Gonzalo Coelho, accompanied by Vespucci, returned to Brazil. They followed the Brazilian coast southward, seeking a passage to the Moluccas islands (in Indonesia). However, the route to the Rio Grande do Sul turned out to be so long that the explorers could no longer deny that they were dealing with a vast, unknown continent – a fourth part (after Europe, Africa, and Asia) of the world. Vespucci now abandoned Columbus's idea of having discovered the leading edge of Asia; this does not, however, mean that he realized that the New World of which he spoke extended northward to the lands claimed by Cabot in the name of England, and by the brothers Corte Real in the name of Portugal.

In January, 1504, the Frenchman Paulmier de Gonneville, accompanied by two Portuguese sailors whom he had brought on board, set sail for the New World. They spent six months there, among the Carijo and Guarnanis tribes of southern Brazil, where Vespucci had traveled during his voyage of 1501–1502. Now, along with some Portuguese, Spanish and Italian sailors, some Frenchmen were beginning to think of Brazil as part of this New World of which Vespucci had spoken.

Meanwhile, in the Caribbean, it had been ascertained that Cuba was an island. Also, we have Cantino's map, dating from 1502, which depicts the Gulf of Mexico with a definite form. Was this by accident or design? Had unknown or little-known voyages taken

place? Certainty about the Gulf, in any case, would not come for another fifteen to twenty years, which is further evidence of the extreme slowness with which America was discovered.

In the meanwhile, the expression "The New World" was losing much of its mythical, antiquated, and medieval resonance. Still, very little was still known about America, and it remained attached to Asia on Bartolomeu Columbus's map, although not on Vespucci's. The latter's work, given to Soderini, was included in the *Cosmographie Introductio* of Martin Waldseemüller, who was a member of the small Académie de Saint-Dié, located in the duchy of Lorraine. In the ninth chapter of the *Introductio* it is suggested that the new continent be named America, after the Florentine who recognized it for what it was. This was in 1507, fifteen years after October 12, 1492, a date that the majority of his contemporaries had already forgotten. The *Cosmographie Introductio* went through six editions in the first year of its publication; however Amerigo Vespucci, in Seville, knew nothing of its enormous success. Cartography itself, for its part, proved quite stubborn; as late as 1523, Giovanni Vespucci, Amerigo's own nephew, makes no use of the new term.

The penetration and conquest of Puerto Rico began in 1508; in 1509, Cuba and Jamaica were explored, while at the same time the northern coast of today's Colombia was reached. It was then that Santa Maria la Antigua del Darién was founded, the first – although ephemeral – "city" on the South American continent, located in the Atrato valley, not far from the border separating the current states of Panama and Colombia.

It was from the same Santa Maria la Antigua del Darién that, in 1513, a movement in a totally different direction was to begin. We will have reason later, in connection with a discussion of the consequences of the discovery, to discuss the various ways in which explorers penetrated the area of the Panamanian isthmus; for now, let us continue our description of the discovery itself. Balboa, who first appeared as an obscure soldier of fortune, had gained enough prestige to exercise a de facto authority over Antigua. On September 25, 1513, after an excruciatingly difficult climb, Balboa and his men stared down from the cliffs to the shining immensity of the Pacific Ocean. On the twenty-ninth of September, the discoverer waded into the Pacific up to his knees and took possession of it in the name of Ferdinand of Aragon and the Queen of Castille, Joanna the Mad (Ferdinand's daughter). Among the witnesses to this event was one Francisco Pizarro, the future conqueror of Peru. The route to the west

coast of South America was now opened, although it was to be another twenty years before another European followed that route.

In the meantime, the exploration of the southeastern coast of South America continued. In 1516, Juan Diaz de Solis descended to the Rio de la Plata but was a victim of cannibalism. In 1520, Magellan reached – and crossed – the strait that would bear his name. The passage, for which men had searched in vain for nearly twenty-eight years, had finally been found, although quite far from the zone in which it had been expected. Magellan then made his way north along the west coast of the continent to 32°5' south latitude, thereby becoming the maritime discoverer of Chili. All that was left to do was “stitch together” the discoveries of Magellan and Balboa so that the entire silhouette of South America could be revealed.

We must now, however, turn our attention back to the Caribbean side of America. One result of the continued search for the westward passage to Asia was the discovery of the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. In 1517, Francisco Hernández de Cordoba skirted along the coast of the Yucatan desert and the tropical forest of Tabasco, although he made no contact with the Mayas. The next year Juan de Grijalva went farther north, reaching Tampico or Pánuco. With Ponce de León having reached Florida in 1512, only the land between Tampico and Florida remained to be explored. This was carried out in 1519, by Alonso Alvarez de Pineda.

On February 10, 1519, Hernándo Cortés, rebelling against Velázquez, the governor, fled the island of Cuba. He headed for Mexico, having learned the year before – from Grijalva – of the existence of the Aztec civilization. We will not describe here his conquest. We will only mention that, after subduing the interior part of Mexico, Cortés immediately headed for the Pacific coast with the intention of reaching the Moluccas by way of the west or south Mexican coast. In 1526, a ship, bound from Spain, reached the Mexican port of Zacatula, after having followed the entire Pacific coast of South America. In 1527, Cortés sent Alvaro de Saavedra Cerón to the Orient from the Mexican port of Zihuatanejo; and, in fact, de Saavedra Cerón reached Tidore, an island of the Maylasan archipelago. Meanwhile, the exploration of Baja California, alternately taken for an island and an archipelago, proceeded. This led, in 1542, to the discovery of the California coast itself, by Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and Bartolomé Ferrello. Pushing farther north, Spanish explorers reached Alaska in the eighteenth century, at the time when the United States was gaining its independence.

During the fourth decade of the sixteenth century, many important changes took place, on both coasts of the South American continent. Most of these changes involved annexations. On the east coast, they were mainly Portuguese, on the west, Spanish.

On March 3, 1522, the first captaincy to be seen on the western shores of the Atlantic was accorded to the Portuguese officer Fernão de Noronha. This donation was conferred by João III, for the island of São João, on the Brazilian coast. As for continental Brazil: the earliest donation of a captaincy dates from March 10, 1534, and was conferred on Duarte Coelho, for Pernambuco. Numerous other captaincies were established in Brazil. These donations, followed by occupations, allowed for the gathering of precise information about the coast and prepared the way for the conquest of the interior.

The Spaniards who occupied the west coast of South America chose for their base camp the newly formed locality of Panama, located on the Pacific coast of the isthmus that bears the same name. The first explorer to follow the entire west coast of South America was Pascal de Andagoya, in 1522. He brought back with him information concerning the riches of the Inca civilization. This information inspired Francisco Pizarro to conclude an agreement with Diego de Almagro and Hernando Luque. After two failed attempts, Pizarro finally set sail for Peru in January, 1531. He reached Tumbes at the beginning of 1532. From there he marched on Cajamarca where, on November 15 of the same year, he took the Incan leader Atahualpa prisoner. The conquest of Peru had begun. We will not here describe the conquest itself; we will instead limit ourselves to pointing out that the subsequent explorers and conquerers of Chile (Almagro and especially Pedro de Valdivia) departed for Chile on a land route from Peru. Knowledge of the west coast of South America was growing more exact.

It is time now to direct our attention to the Atlantic coast of the North American continent. Up to now we have merely described the appearances of John Cabot at the end of the fifteenth century and of the brothers Corte Real at the start of the sixteenth. It is to another Azorean, João Fernandes, that we shall now turn. Departing from Bristol in association with three British merchants, Fernandes set sail for Greenland and Labrador in 1501. Was the purpose of this voyage, even at this early date, to find a northwest passage to Asia by circumnavigation of North America? This idea is not unthinkable, although Sebastian Cabot, John's son, was in fact the

first navigator whom we are certain had this intention. In 1509 he reached 67° north latitude and apparently also entered the Hudson Strait; however, he had to turn back because of ice and a mutiny.

In 1523, the French too set out to discover a northern passage to Asia. The commander of this voyage was once again an Italian, the Florentine Giovanni da Verrazano. He made landfall in what is now North Carolina and from there steered north. He entered what was to become the port of New York, spent two weeks in Narragansett Bay, passed Cape Cod, and followed the coast north into Maine. Jacques Cartier, departing from Saint-Malo in 1534, continued the French explorations. He traversed the Gulf of St. Lawrence without spotting the river itself. In 1535, during his second voyage, he followed the latter up to the site of the current city of Quebec. In 1541, he returned to North America and established a small colony at Cap Rouge, slightly to the north of Quebec. This first French attempt at colonization ended in failure, leaving France cut off from the New World until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Sixteenth century England saw a considerable amount of propagandizing in favor of maritime explorations. Sebastian Cabot, who had returned to England in 1547, played a leading role in this movement. Under his influence, the English became deeply involved in the search for a northern passage. Martin Frobisher was the first to seek this passage by way of the non-existent strait of Anian. In 1576 he reached Baffin Bay. English explorations continued in these northerly areas through the third decade of the seventeenth century. At about the same time, Francis Drake, in 1580, completed the first around-the-world voyage by an English sailor. In the course of this voyage, he followed the Pacific coast of the Americas from Chile to Vancouver. Somewhat later, in 1615, several Dutchmen, notably Willem Schouten and Jacques Lemaire, in the course of a voyage to India by the southwestern route and the Pacific, discovered Cape Horn, which Drake had reached without realizing it. At the same time, the English were setting foot in New England and in Virginia, the French in Canada, and the Dutch in the Hudson River region. By now all of Atlantic America had found a place in the consciousness of the European peoples. Full of their traditions and their discoveries, these peoples managed to destroy the "Indian" societies they encountered. For the maritime nations of Europe, the discovery of the geographical layout of America had been brought to a close. *It had taken some 125 years to do it*, having begun on October 12, 1492, when Columbus unknowingly reached the New World.

Repercussions in the Atlantic Zone

Having sketched the broad outlines of the discovery, we shall now turn our attention to its repercussions, bearing in mind that just as the Caribbean islands and the Atlantic seaboard were the first to be discovered, they were also the first to manifest the effects of the discovery.

In general, much more attention has been paid to the repercussions on Europe than to the repercussions on America itself. Yet the former are in fact both more difficult to isolate and more resistant to definition than the latter.

It should first be noted that even if, in the course of the 125-year discovery of America, the presence of America in the consciousness of those Europeans who had direct or indirect contact with it grew, this was hardly the case for most other Europeans, that is to say, the immense majority of them. It has been established for more than fifty years that the new horizons produced by the French Renaissance were directed far more toward Turkey and Asia than America. Even in Spain, there was more interest in the achievements of Spanish military might in Europe than in America. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the chronicler of Cortés, himself said as much. Geography continued to be taught in the traditional manner. Although it is undeniable that the myth of the noble savage emerged early on, its influence was limited to very small groups, particularly churchmen and humanists. The idea of utopia can of course be found in the works of Thomas More but also, to a certain extent, in *Las Casas*. European artists were very little influenced by the artistic creations of the American peoples while, in the other direction, the profound influence of European art on American art is well known. On the other hand, American medicinal plants were described already in the sixteenth century and turned up in European pharmacies. Botanical knowledge was, of course, not the only kind of scientific knowledge to be imported to Europe from America, but most of this knowledge remained the property of an elite. An even narrower elite found cause to modify its conceptions of moral philosophy and international law on the basis of observations of the behavior of the native American.

Generally speaking, it is in the sphere of economics that the influence of America on Europe has been deemed to be most important and demonstrable. This idea was first propounded in the eighteenth century by the likes of Abbot Raynal and Adam Smith, although always in association with the influence exercised by the discovery

of the sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope, and without sufficient effort to define the extent of influence of each development taken separately. In the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels attributed the rise of the bourgeoisie to the combined influence of these two events. However, these speculations can be largely attributed to ignorance of the fact that during the Middle Ages, in the Mediterranean basin and around the Black Sea, a colonial economy had already been established. This was an economic system that lasted for four hundred years – from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries – and which can legitimately be called the commercial revolution of the Middle Ages. From this period forward, colonial commerce was not the sole factor in the development of this revolution, and the growth of an urban bourgeoisie is attributable to still other factors. The stimulation of the European economy, which has been believed to have been a result of the discovery of America, can in fact be found already in the Middle Ages; indeed it can even be asserted that the discovery itself, and especially the conquest of America, would have been impossible if the effects of these diverse and combined stimuli had not accumulated beforehand, creating within Europe the necessary conditions for potential economic expansion. It has sometimes been claimed that commerce with America brought about the creation of new commercial methods; yet any historian who knows both the lower Middle Ages and modern times also knows that the methods of colonial economy in modern times are a continuation of medieval methods.

Next there is the question of what impact the vast quantities of gold – and especially silver – imported from America, had on the development of Europe. American silver imports, it should first be noted, did not begin to surpass the production from Tyrolian mines until the second half of the sixteenth century. Moreover, there is a question as to how much of this silver actually stayed in Europe, since much of it was apparently sent on to Asia in exchange for high-priced goods. For a long time it has been generally assumed that the rise in prices in Europe was due to the influx of American silver. But in fact the so-called “revolution in prices” began in Anvers and Flanders after the year 1520, that is to say, long before the arrival of precious metals into Spain from America. Does not the monopolistic character of long-distance commerce within Europe provide us with a better starting point for an explanation of the inflation? Equally, we know that at this time there was a definite speed-up in the circulation of money due to the introduction of cer-

tain banking techniques that, until this period, were widespread only in the Mediterranean region, especially in Italy. It should be emphasized that these remarks on monetary movement can be used to explain certain social disruptions in Europe, in exactly the same way as has been done with the supposed social consequences of the influx of precious metals from America. It is also clear that these social transformations vary according to time and place, and that Seville, during this hundred-year period, experienced more change than anywhere else. Although the transformations experienced in Seville might have been caused by developments in America, why should they be perceived as the exclusive causes? And what are we to say about other places and other times?

It thus seems quite clear that the Europe of modern times was not created by America. On the other hand, America offered new possibilities to many Europeans. It is hardly necessary to add that the same can be said of European states interested in colonization.

Obviously, the conquistadors were the first Europeans to jump at the new opportunities offered on the other side of the Atlantic. Among this group were heroes, but there were also many criminals. The situation on the "frontier" of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century was hardly any different.

However, at the end of the fifteenth, and during the sixteenth century, many of the adventurers who subdued America were steeped in the atmosphere of chivalric romances. Cortés himself mused of Roland, and Bernal Diaz del Castillo found in Mexico many similarities with the enchanted world of Amadis of Gaul. Some of the conquerors carried their bedside reading into battle, and the importation of novels to the New World was soon forbidden; according to the edicts, these novels could corrupt not only the Spaniards but also natives to whom, in some cases, they had been read. Nonetheless, this did not mean that all the conquistadors ceased to have chivalric aspirations. What the conquistadors wanted, what they searched for greedily, was gold and women. But many strove also for honor and renown, just like the protagonists in the novels, and all of them thought of themselves as continuing the medieval struggle against the Infidel. Now, of course, this Infidel was not a Moor but a pagan Amerindian: "Quien duda que la polvara contro los infieles es incienso para al Señor," said Fernández de Oviedo.

On Hispaniola and the other islands of the Caribbean Sea, the conquerors were very soon demanding a *repartimiento* [apportionment] of Indians, which would also give them the right to demand

labor from them. The settlers wanted to live like nobles. It was why they had come. They wanted to get rich and not work. They had agreed to put their lives in danger, to struggle against great material and natural hardships, but they did not want to labor on a regular basis. In their minds, the Indians were there for that.

The system of apportioning Indian labor, known in the Spanish-American colonies by the term *repartimiento*, had its origins – as did so many other Hispano-American colonial institutions – in medieval Europe. The term *repartimiento* was first used during the reconquest of Spain in the early Middle Ages, and as a system *repartimiento* was an outgrowth of the Castilian socio-political system. In the Canary Islands too, the authorities turned their attention to apportioning native laborers. Columbus at first had recourse to a tax, paid in gold powder or in cotton. However, the tax proved to be an unbearable burden for the Indians, and many of them fled into the mountains. Next the Spaniards obliged the *caciques* [local chiefs] to provide personal servants and to work the fields in the Spanish villages alongside these servants. According to Las Casas, after 1496 most of the settlers passed their time in idleness, while the responsibility for all labor fell to the Indians. The tragic results of the *repartimiento* system are well demonstrated by Rodrigo de Albuquerque's *repartimiento* of 1514 which, coupled with diseases brought over by the Europeans, resulted in the decimation of the local Taina population.

As the colonists of the Greater Antilles were settling into their *seigniorial languor*, other Spaniards had begun the conquest of *terra firme*. Many organized themselves into *huestes*, that is to say, groups of adventurers reminiscent of the *Grandes Compagnies* of the European Middle Ages, or else into groups similar to the Catalonian *Almogavares* that had existed since the decline of the Byzantine Empire. Accords reminiscent of medieval Mediterranean associations – such as the *commenda* or the *colleganza*, and the *societas maris* – also existed among some members. However, rather than an association for the appropriation and reclamation of land, these groups engaged solely in slave hunting, throughout Central America. Santa Maria la Antigua del Darién, which was mentioned above in connection with the discovery of America, served as a base camp and rallying point for these expeditions. This continued until 1530, when Panama City took over the role of Santa Maria. The slave hunters were themselves often accompanied by slaves or by freed blacks, who treated the natives with no more leniency than did their

masters. They were paid a part of the spoils, although their masters often took back a part or all of it, if they were slaves. The latter, along with the horses, were considered to be the communal property of the expedition members. These attitudes too are medieval in origin, predating the discovery and conquest of America by the Atlantic route.

Let us now turn our attention to these new men; men for whom the New World offered possibilities that, until the discovery, were beyond their reach. The Spanish community of Panama of the year 1519 – that is to say, a quarter century after the arrival of the first settlers to Haiti – is fairly well known to us. In most cases we know the pre-departure status of those who left Spain for Panama. Half of them were either sailors or soldiers; a little less than forty percent of them practiced manual trades. The rest were peasants although they, like the rest, wanted to live as nobles. Las Casas had not understood this reality, since he hoped to employ the tradesmen and peasants (*labradores*) in their usual labors: his failure is well known to us. There was as yet no need to import blacks, since enough of them were on hand for the cavalcade or *entrada*, i.e., the slave hunts. Apparently they were used for the most part to cut trails by machete. During the conquest, and afterwards, there were even black *encomenderos*. Most of them were freed slaves who considered themselves conquistadors. Some of them are known to have fought the Indians quite courageously. As a rule, they came to America via Spain, not Africa, as was to be the case with the vast number of plantation slaves brought later.

Of course the shift to importing slaves from Africa would prove to be one of the most important that the discovery of America produced in the entire Atlantic zone. There was indeed a shift in the center of gravity of the slave trade, toward the Atlantic coast of Africa. In the Middle Ages, the slave trade had tended to follow an important commercial route that started at the Indian Ocean and led to the Islamic lands of the Near and Middle East. Most of the slaves were Muslim. To a lesser extent, these slave traders had brought black slaves along trans-Saharan routes to Mediterranean Africa, from which some of them reached southern Europe. By the sixteenth century most slave traders were now Christian, often Portuguese, and they were transporting their numerous captives to America.

Just as it was across the Atlantic that black slaves were brought to America, it was across this same ocean that European attitudes and

behaviors, which were to play such an integral role in the institutions of the American colonies, were also brought. This too is an important repercussion that the discovery produced in the Atlantic region.

This process of Europeanization had begun with Columbus, who had obtained special powers, of a medieval kind, from Isabel and Ferdinand. These powers were in fact purely medieval, more so than the powers granted to Alonso de Quintanilla and Pedro Fernández on Great Canary Island in 1480. Columbus's powers were modeled, on the one hand, on those of the Castilian Admiralty, a great feudal office, and, on the other hand, from the powers granted to viceroys who governed possessions in Spain and Italy. As for the admiralty's powers: these went back to the fourteenth century, that is to say, to a period in which the functions of the great dignitaries of the Castilian crown were much greater than they were at the moment of the discovery of America. In this way, Columbus sought his authority directly from the Middle Ages, when offices of this nature were hereditary. Indeed the Genoan succeeded in having his vice-royalty granted an hereditary character. This allowed him to establish his duties by *mayorazgo* [primogeniture] and thus to will them to his descendants. Naturally, the royal house ultimately retracted this privilege, but it opened the door through which traditional medieval institutions could enter.

The colonial functionaries were also granted powers dating back to the Middle Ages. This was true, for example, of the *adelantados*, who could be found in the backwaters of Chile and whose office, which dated from the thirteenth century reconquest of Spain, can be traced to Castille and Leon. The same holds for the *alcades*, although they often sided with the central authorities against their immediate superiors, whose power was of the traditional feudal kind. Here too, even in the reactions of the central authorities, we can see continuity with the Middle Ages. Indeed feudal traits (and hence a medieval origin) can be identified in almost all the colonies founded on the American continent, whatever their country of provenance. This is as true of Portuguese Brazil as it is of the various English, French, and Dutch colonies, even though they were founded considerably later. This phenomenon is so widespread that one can as legitimately speak of the "introduction" of feudal law into the New World as of the introduction of Roman law to Europe in an earlier period. This transfer, across the Atlantic Ocean, of the historical experience of a colonizing and victorious Europe is one of the foun-

dations of what might be called the Atlantic civilization. It is certain that this was the basis on which the central authorities sought to eradicate – although without any ultimate or absolute victory – the influence of medieval precedents in the New World.

Of course, it was the conquest itself that made all this possible. It is therefore appropriate to attempt to identify its principle features, since they also characterize the repercussions in Atlantic zone. It is clear that even the conquest of Peru would have been inconceivable without the maintenance and renewal, by way of the Atlantic, of the stock of personnel and of its material and functional support.

Unlike the discovery and surveying of the circumference or silhouette of the American continent, which lasted some 125 years, the conquest of Iberian America took only half a century. Given the distances and natural obstacles, this was an incredibly speedy feat. By comparison, it is well known that the English colonists confined themselves to the Atlantic coast up until the revolution and that their conquest of the interior, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, took slightly more than a hundred years, not ending until the close of the nineteenth century, with the disappearance of the “frontier.” As prodigious as the conquest of the North American interior was, it was carried out with far more advanced technical means – including, by the end, the railroad – than were available to the Spanish conquerors. This comparison demonstrates quite clearly the extraordinary nature of the Spanish conquest. It can even be qualified as a “modern” enterprise, given its breadth and the uneven nature of the framework in which it operated. Yet it was carried out in a medieval mold, as much from the point of view of the mind-set of the conquerors as in their institutions and equipment; and indeed this mold was, in some ways, a powerful aid to the conquest. The Spaniards believed they were being helped by Saint Jacques and the Virgin Mary. Did not Cortés say that he owed everything to God, although he added, “and to the horses”? Here we see an example of what might be termed “primitive technology” or even “natural technology,” i.e., the use of certain animal resources unknown to the Amerindians: the horse, but also the attack dog and even the pig, many of which followed the *hueste* and served as nourishment. Of course there were also firearms – but they were few in number and their quality was no higher than those used in the Middle Ages. The same can be said of the iron and steel-based equipment, which was also unknown to the Indians before the arrival of the Europeans. These technological factors played a decisive role in the con-

quest of the Aztec, Chibcha, and Inca states – because in these cases the invaders had only to occupy the capital city and execute the chief. But these methods were not as effective against the less developed tribes, which used poisoned arrows for defense and the natural environment for cover. Nature, which was the ally of these tribes, provided very little protection for the Amerindian states. Frederici has already noted the relative ease with which the conquerors established themselves on lands inhabited by advanced Indian cultures, that is, those that had already gained dominion over nature. On the “barbarian” lands, however, the conquerors first had to triumph over the natural environment itself.

The religious fanaticism of the Spanish was a great help to them. This is one of several ways in which the Spanish conquest of America is reminiscent of the Islamic expansion. In the one case, an immense world was conquered over a period of fifty years. In the other, another immense world – stretching from Lisbon to India – was conquered in a hundred-year period. The greater rapidity of the Spanish expansion can of course be explained in terms of the profound difference in levels of material civilization between Europe and America. The Arabs, by contrast, enjoyed no such material superiority over the citizens of the lands they conquered. This is further evidence of the fundamental importance of the Atlantic discovery (and its repercussions) for the native population, especially in light of the fact that the Spanish were far fewer in number than the disciples of the Prophet. Yet in both cases the conquerors were inspired by an enormous hunger for wealth.

The Spanish also benefited from the fear that the Indians experienced at the sight of the invaders, especially initially. As experience proved, the extent of the fear was in proportion to the development of native religious conceptions (i.e., the greater the religious development, the greater the fear). The complex of terror experienced by Montezuma is well documented. This factor was less important in the case of Atahualpa, but in both cases the Spanish victory hinged on the elements of surprise and violence. Often, two kinds of primitivism collided. In the minds of the Spanish, their aim was to vanquish Satanic powers. Thus, two ritualistic civilizations clashed. At Cajamarca the clash was set off when Pizarro’s chaplain, Father Valerde, presented the Holy Bible to the Incan leader: draped in the robes of his office, the Incan threw the symbol of Christian faith to the ground. Finally, after Atahualpa’s execution by the garrote, ritual primitivism exploded on both sides. For the Incas, the source of

their rituals was destroyed; for the Spanish, there was triumph, and executions were followed by funeral masses.

One enormous consequence of the European conquest of Latin America was racial mixing [*métissage*]. This again was an influence brought across the Atlantic, whether its result was a mulatto, *metis*, or black person. These mixtures initiated an important process of acculturation, although in many cases the process was not successfully completed.

In fact, the mixing of races began as soon as Columbus disembarked at Hispaniola. However, when he returned to La Navidad during his second voyage, the Admiral discovered that the entire settlement had been wiped out: Taino husbands had taken vengeance on the Spanish invaders. The Spaniards, deprived of white women, had, he learned, behaved quite abominably; some had taken three or four Indian women for themselves without a thought for any prior commitments the women might have made. During the first decades of the sixteenth century, the slave hunts on *terra firme* were also woman hunts. According to Bernal Diaz, during the conquest of Mexico, many women were taken by the conquistadors. Some were even given to the conquistadors by their own fathers. The Guaranis chiefs in Brazil hoped by this means to make allies of the invaders. Garcilaso de la Vega, the most famous of the mixed-blood conquerors, stated that racial mixing was a powerful tool of conquest, because it caused the parents of the Indian bride to enter into service to the conquistador. The *encomienda* favored concubinage, and it is known that Paraguay was given the nickname "Mohammed's Heaven." The Church did what it could to curb this practice, although it generally limited itself to baptizing the concubines. However, marriages were sometimes performed. In spite of that, in 1514, only sixty-four of the one hundred seventy-one married Spaniards were married to Indians, and these were men of the lower social ranks. In the early period, many of the mixed-blood children born out of wedlock were acknowledged by their fathers. The first generation of these children, in fact, played an important part in the conquest; we also know that, much later, the Brazilian *mamelucos* played an equally important role among the *bandeiras*, who were so given to slave hunting. But in the end, the enormous growth of the *metis* population resulted in the creation of a separate group (itself comprising many gradations) that was often a victim of discrimination.

As to black slaves: since the early Middle Ages, many of them

had been living in Spain and Portugal, just as they had throughout all the Mediterranean countries. With the colonization of the islands of the Mediterranean Atlantic (that is, the Canary, Madera, and Azore islands), and later the islands of the Gulf of Guinea and especially São Tomé, the black slave force began to be employed in the sugar plantations. The slaves thus emigrated to the New World along with the sugar cane. As a consequence, this enormous area of plantations, stretching from the Caribbean region of Brazil to the south of the current United States – although this was a later development – and including a small fringe of the west coast of South America, developed into an Afro-America. However, similarity does not imply an identical evolution. Also, large numbers of black slaves were employed in mines or else as domestic servants. In the mine regions, racial mixing sometimes took the form of black men with Indian women, although it was more often a consequence of the cohabitation of white masters with black slaves.

We will not here examine the diverse results of racial mixing in South America, although the rich nomenclature of the colonial period is eloquent testimony to these results. In North America, racial mixing was much less widespread, because of the much less pronounced native presence. At the beginning of the English conquest, there were hardly two hundred thousand Indians east of the Mississippi. This estimate itself may be too high, since it seems that the population of the entire area north of Mexico was no greater than five hundred thousand.

The changes to the animal and vegetable kingdom were at least as important as those to the human realm. Wheat was planted next to native corn and manioc plants. Sugar cane was brought to the New World from the islands of the eastern Atlantic, where it had been imported from the Mediterranean. Its history was long: first discovered in Palestine during the Crusades, sugar cane had been planted on Cyprus, then in Sicily, in Spain, and finally in Portugal. From the islands of the eastern Atlantic, it had been transplanted to the Gulf of Guinea and from there to Brazil, although it was also spread throughout the Caribbean and Mexico. Grape vines were introduced in Peru, and from there they traveled south. Bananas were brought from the Canary Islands, as were pigs, which multiplied at an astonishing rate in the wild. The same obtained for the animals of the bovine family. Horses, donkeys, and mules were imported on Columbus's second voyage. Mules were so plentifully raised that, to cite but one number, more than fifty thousand of them were used

on the route between Mexico City and Acapulco, the site at which the Manila galleon landed. The role later played by cattle on the pampas and, much later, on the American plains (after the elimination of the bison) is well known. All these transformations caused a fundamental change in the conditions of life, and all were brought by way of the Atlantic.

In comparison with the anthropological, botanical, and vegetal changes the European "discovery" caused in America, the changes in Europe – themselves very difficult to gauge – were surely of secondary importance. The overall structure of European society was not transformed by the discovery of America; on the other hand, the native American society was either destroyed or marginalized, and the native sources demonstrate this destruction quite strikingly.

From the very beginning, the presence of the Europeans was traumatic for the Indians. The newcomers, at least in the beginning, were thought to be supernatural beings, heralded by ancient traditions and expected to put at end to life as the Indians knew it. The invaders were accompanied by frightening beings; by firearms and horrifyingly incomprehensible objects: falconets, arquebuses, and armor. The testimony provided by the natives, however, was always produced after the conquest, that is, when the destruction of the old way of life was either completed or in the process of being completed. Our sources are Aztec, Mayan, and Inca. None of them mention that, at the time of the European arrival, all of these societies were in a period of crisis: the Aztecs were surrounded by enemies, and their own people were mistreated and massacred in honor of the gods; the Mayan civilization was broken up, and the Quechas were in the midst of a civil war. Into these societies, sapped from within, men marched – or were they Gods? – shrouded in iron. The *Chilam Balam* shows the degree of terror inspired in the natives by the sight of one such greedy and violent conquistador, Alvarado. In Peru, Titu Cusi Yupanqui notes the surprise of the Quechas at the sight of foreigners "talking alone" to pieces of paper; he is speaking of the pages of books, that is to say, the Bible or a novel of chivalry. Even without their armor, the bearded men terrified the beardless Indians.

After their defeat, the Indians realized that they been conquered by a very small force. This belated realization was often echoed in their accounts of it and pushed them to exaggerate the terror felt at the sight of the newcomers. In any case, this terror was only felt in the more advanced societies. The "savages" resisted right from the

beginning, while the "civilized" began to resist only later. Initially, they tried to acquire the powers of the white men by becoming their brothers and through racial mixing, that is to say, by offering them their women. On the other hand, in the struggle with the Araucans in Chile, the mixing occurred in the opposite direction – the Indians seized Spanish women. As a rule, however, it was the conquerors who produced the mixed-blood children. The phenomenon was so frequent that it caused a kind of physiological shock to the population. Still, after the initial period of violence, the colonists began to see in the mixing a method of conversion and therefore approved of it, no matter how absurd this might appear to a later, more rational mind.

In the parts of North America colonized and conquered by north Europeans, there are very few traces of the phenomena we have described in relation to Central and South America. In the first place, this is because the Indian population was far smaller; secondly, their populations were ultimately decimated far more by epidemics than by arms. There were also profound changes in their style of life, especially on the plains, brought about by the appearance of huge herds of wild horses, coming from northern Mexico. This is, once more, a repercussion of the discovery of America, and its effects in this case were felt as much by the horse as by the Indian who learned to ride it. Farther north, the forest Indians did engage in a certain amount of racial mixing with white trappers and peddlers, French and others.

It should of course be pointed that, although America as such, in consequence of the discovery, extracted more resources from the land than it had prior to the discovery, the natives themselves profited from this extraction to a much lesser degree than did the settlers. The *metis*, in this regard, occupied, as usual, a middle position, although the validity of this statement naturally varies according to time and place. However, all in all, it must be said that the effect on the native population, which had settled the land rather sparsely before the discovery (in spite of what certain authors, old and new, have said on the subject), was devastating, although more so by the epidemics brought from Europe than by either the savagery of the conquest or the subsequent exploitation of Indian labor. Along with this, it should be pointed out that another one of the principle effects of the penetration of America by the Atlantic route was the advent of the city as the center of human settlement. The successors to the tribal and even imperial centers – such as Tenochtitlán or

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Cizco – were the numerous colonial cities, large and small, all of which were modeled on the medieval city. These cities became the indisputable sign of the fact that the principal repercussion of the discovery of America was the advent of an Atlantic civilization.

Repercussions in the Pacific Zone

A first point must be made: the repercussions felt in the Pacific zone would have been inconceivable without the earlier repercussions experienced on the Atlantic side. Only after the penetration of the Atlantic area was the Pacific reached, at which time the repercussions in the Pacific zone began to be felt.

The first areas of the Pacific to be affected were in Mexico and Peru, beginning in the sixteenth century.

In the sixteenth century, the explorers Alvaro de Saavedra, Lope de Villalobos, Legazpi, and Urdaneta set sail for the Orient. These voyages were preceded and prepared for by the voyages of Garcia Joffré de Loayza, who had left from Spain. Passing through the Straits of Magellan in 1525, he died somewhere in the Pacific. One of his ships, however, reached Midinao, in the Phillipines, and then made for the Moluccas, which the Portuguese (with whom the Spanish were in conflict) had already reached. From Mexico, Cortés sent a ship to their rescue, commanded by Saavedra; however, when the Spaniard attempted to send his ship back to Mexico for reinforcements, he was unable to find a favorable wind. The surviving Spaniards returned to Europe on a Portuguese ship, via the Cape of Good Hope. In the meantime, Charles Quint had ceded the Moluccas to the Portuguese, subject to an indemnity.

In 1564, for his part, Ruy Lopez de Villalobos left for the Phillipines from Mexico. He reached there but died soon afterward. His survivors too were forced to make their way back to Mexico by way of Europe, and with Portuguese help. Once again, a direct return to Mexico had been impossible.

Toward the end of 1564, two Basques, Legazpi and Urdaneta, set sail from western Mexico. They established a Spanish settlement on the Philippine island of Cebu. This time, by taking a more northerly route than had been tried before, Urdaneta was able to make his way back to Mexico. He landed his vessel at Acapulco on October 8, 1565, marking the discovery of the first sure round-trip route between America and the Phillipines. It was this route that the Manila galleon followed, and the conquest of the Phillipines could

proceed. Mactan, the island on which Magellan perished, was occupied soon after. Legazpi now bore the title of *adelantado* of the Philippines. The medieval vocabulary and its institutions thus persisted. By the end of 1569, Legazpi had conquered several more islands. The next year Manila was taken, and reinforcements were arriving regularly from Mexico. As in America, the *repartimiento* was introduced. Missionaries began to arrive, and lands were taken according to the traditional ritual of the *requerimiento*. The Spanish settlement of the Philippines was continually reinforced from Mexico.

In 1567, Alvaro de Mendaña set sail from Peru and discovered the Solomon Islands, one of the sites of Japanese-American hostilities in 1942. About thirty years after his discovery of the Solomons, the same Mendaña discovered the Marquesas. He tried to start a colony there but he died, willing his office of *adelantado* to his wife, who had accompanied him. This second voyage was piloted by the Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandez de Quiros.

In 1605, de Quiros left again from Callao, with three ships that the viceroy of Peru had put at his disposition. He discovered Tahiti and the New Hebrides. Another Portuguese explorer who had been part of the expedition, Luis Vaez de Torres, went his own way and discovered the strait that bears his name, located between New Guinea and Australia.

In the eighteenth century, several other expeditions left from Peru for the same latitudes; however, it is time now to turn our attention back to Mexico, from where, in this same period, several navigators set out and traveled to Alaska, thus completing the discovery of the northwest coast of America. However, before attempting a description of these explorations, we should not fail to point out that, while the consequences of the voyages that left from Mexico were colonization and transoceanic commerce between Manila and Acapulco, the voyages undertaken from Peru had neither colonial nor commercial consequences (only geographical). Both the Spanish and Portuguese explorations followed an east-to-west movement, that is from America toward Asia. On the other hand, the Alaskan voyagers came face to face with a movement in the opposite direction, that is, from west to east, Asia to America, emanating from a power that was both Asiatic and European: Russia.

In July of 1779, Ignacio Arteaga and Juan Francisco Bodega advanced to 60° north latitude, within sight of Mount Ely, in Alaska. Nearly forty years earlier, in 1741, a Russian expedition, under the command of the Dane Vitus Bering, had explored the same area,

and proceeded farther south. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, the Spanish and Russians crossed paths on more than one occasion. Departing from Acapulco, Malaspina advanced as far north as the Bering straits. During the same period, seal hunting was beginning to attract mariners from Britain, Portugal, France and the newly created United States, to what would later be known as British Columbia. The British and Americans arrived via Cape Horn, the others from the Asian East, having departed from Europe. The Spanish claimed possession of several inconsequential pieces of land in the north, while the Russians held their position in Alaska until its purchase by the United States in 1867.

The majority of Pacific crossings to the west coast of America, which we have just described, cannot be considered repercussions of the discovery of the New World. The presence of the Russians is but a continuation of their drive to the Pacific, resulting from the colonization of Siberia. And South Asian interests motivated the activities of the other European powers: India for the English and the French, Macao for the Portugese. Only the presence of navigators from Spain and the United States can be construed as an effect of the discovery of America, and a continuation of the east-to-west movement.

As for the former English colonies in the East: they constituted little more than a secondary commerical market. For the Spanish, however, the colonization of the Phillipines, whose starting point was Mexico, can be defined as a repercussion, in the Pacific zone, of the discovery of America.

The Philippine islands were not only a colony of a Spanish colony, but also the starting point for the first regular commerical contacts between Asia and America. In general, in the sixteenth century, two galleons navigated annually in each direction. By the end of the seventeenth century, only one galleon was sent from each direction, but it was three to four times larger than the earlier ships, carrying several thousand tons of cargo. Later, two galleons were again sent, and these were yet larger, carrying between sixteen hundred and eighteen hundred tons of cargo, an enormous volume for the time. We are thus speaking of an important current of commercial traffic that lasted for the entire colonial period. Of course, the volume of trade here is not comparable to the traffic on the Atlantic run, between Spain and Nombre de Dios and Veracruz. This trade began in the sixteenth century and was later extended to include a Pacific leg, between Panama and Callao. This Atlantic traffic, it

hardly needs to be emphasized, was steadily internationalized and grew enormously over the course of time. Nevertheless, the traffic between Manila and Acapulco indirectly established a commercial link between New Spain on the one hand, and China, Japan, Indochina, the East Indies, and India on the other. For China, safe passage to Manila was guaranteed through either Macao or Taiwan (Formosa), depending on the vagaries of the Chinese political climate. As for the Islamic lands of the East Indies: Manila had commercial ties with Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and the Celebes (Macassar). In the Indian Ocean, the volume of trade with the great European maritime powers was obviously infinitely greater than the trade between New Spain and Manila. Nevertheless, it remains true that the traffic between Manila and Acapulco remained the sole important commercial contact between the west coast of America and east Asia until the end of the eighteenth century. Along with the colonization of the Philippines, it constitutes the most significant repercussion of the discovery of America on the Pacific zone until the nineteenth century.

Translated from the French by Thomas Epstein