Amerigo Vespucci, Letter to Pier Soderini, Gonfalonier of the Republic of Florence, describing his first voyage to the New World (1497)

Amerigo Vespucci was a Florentine navigator who worked in the business house that outfitted Christopher Columbus's second expedition to the New World. Here he gives an account of the first of his own four voyages. If his claims are accurate, he reached the mainland of the Americas shortly before Cabot and at least fourteen months before Columbus. This letter was widely published in Europe in the early sixteenth century and inspired the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller to name the Americas in 1507.


Magnificent Lord. After humble reverence and due commendations, etc. It may be that your Magnificence will be surprised by (this conjunction of) my rashness and your customary wisdom, in that I should so absurdly bestir myself to write to your Magnificence the present so-prolix letter: knowing that your Magnificence is continually employed in high councils and affairs concerning the good government of this sublime Republic. And will hold me not only presumptuous, but also idly meddlesome in setting myself to write things, neither suitable to your station, nor entertaining, and written in barbarous style, and outside of every canon of polite literature: but my confidence which I have in your virtues and in the truth of my writing, which are things not found written neither by the ancients nor by modern writers, as your Magnificence will in the sequel perceive, makes me bold. The chief cause which moved [me] to write to you, was at the request of the present bearer, who is named Benvenuto Benvenuti our Florentine, very
much, as it is proven, your Magnificence’s servant, and my very good friend: who
happening to be here in this city of Lisbon, begged that I should make communication to
your Magnificence of the things seen by me in divers regions of the world, by virtue of
four voyages which I have made in discovery of new lands: two by order of the king of
Castile, King Don Ferrando VI, across the great gulf of the Ocean-sea, towards the west:
and the other two by command of the puissant King Don Manuel King of Portugal,
towards the south; telling me that your Magnificence would take pleasure thereof, and
that herein he hoped to do you service: wherefore I set me to do it: because I am assured
that your Magnificence holds me in the number of your servants, remembering that in the
time of our youth I was your friend, and now servant: and going to hear the rudiments of
grammar under the fair example and instruction of the venerable monk friar of Saint
Mark Fra Giorgio Antonio Vespucci: whose counsels and teaching would to God that I
had followed: for as saith Petrarch, I should be another man than what I am. Howbeit
soever I grieve not: because I have ever taken delight in worthy matters: and although
these trifles of mine may not be suitable to your virtues, I will say to you as said Pliny to
Maecenas, you were sometime wont to take pleasure in my prattlings: even though your
Magnificence be continuously busied in public affairs, you will take some hour of
relaxation to consume a little time in frivolous or amusing things: and as fennel is
customarily given atop of delicious viands to fit them for better digestion, so may you,
for a relief from your so heavy occupations, order this letter of mine to be read: so that
they may withdraw you somewhat from the continual anxiety and assiduous reflection
upon public affairs: and if I shall be prolix, I crave pardon, my Magnificent Lord. Your
Magnificence shall know that the motive of my coming into his realm of Spain was to
traffic in merchandise: and that I pursued this intent about four years: during which I saw and knew the inconstant shiftings of Fortune: and how she kept changing those frail and transitory benefits: and how at one time she holds man on the summit of the wheel, and at another time drives him back from her, and despoils him of what may be called his borrowed riches: so that, knowing the continuous toil which man undergoes to win them, submitting himself to so many anxieties and risks, I resolved to abandon trade, and to fix my aim upon something more praiseworthy and stable: whence it was that I made preparation for going to see part of the world and its wonders: and herefor the time and place presented themselves most opportunely to me: which was that the King Don Ferrando of Castile being about to despatch four ships to discover new lands towards the west, I was chosen by his Highness to go in that fleet to aid in making discovery: and we set out from the port of Cadiz on the 10th day of May 1497, and took our route through the great gulf of the Ocean-sea: in which voyage we were eighteen months: and discovered much continental land and innumerable islands, and great part of them inhabited: whereas there is no mention made by the ancient writers of them: I believe, because they had no knowledge thereof: for, if I remember well, I have read in some one that he considered that this Ocean-sea was an unpeopled sea: and of this opinion was Dante our poet in the xxvi. chapter of the Inferno, where he feigns the death of Ulysses, in which voyage I beheld things of great wondrousness, as your Magnificence shall understand. As I said above, we left the port of Cadiz four consort ships: and began our voyage in direct course to the Fortunates Isles which are called to-day la gran Canaria, which are situated in the Ocean-sea at the extremity of the inhabited west, set in the third climate: over which the North Pole has an elevation of 27 and a half degrees beyond their
horizon and they are 280 leagues distant from this city of Lisbon, by the wind between mezzo di and libeccio [South-south-west] where we remained eight days, taking in provision of water, and wood and other necessary things: and from here, having said our prayers, we weighed anchor, and gave the sails to the wind, beginning our course to westward, taking one quarter by southwest: and so we sailed on till at the end of 37 days we reached a land which we deemed to be a continent: which is distant westwardly from the isles of Canary about a thousand leagues beyond the inhabited region within the torrid zone: for we found the North Pole at an elevation of 16 degrees above its horizon, and [it was] westward, according to the shewing of our instruments, 75 degrees from the isles of Canary: whereat we anchored with our ships a league and a half from land; and we put out our boats freighted with men and arms: we made towards the land, and before we reached it, had sight of a great number of people who were going along the shore: by which we were much rejoiced: and we observed that they were a naked race: they shewed themselves to stand in fear of us: I believe because they saw us clothed and of other appearance: they all withdrew to a hill, and for whatsoever signals we made to them of peace and of friendliness, they would not come to parley with us: so that, as the night was now coming on, and as the ships were anchored in a dangerous place, being on a rough and shelterless coast, we decided to remove from there the next day, and to go in search of some harbour or bay, where we might place our ships in safety: and we sailed with the maestrale [northwest] wind, thus running along the coast with the land ever in sight, continually in our course observing people along the shore: till after having navigated for two days, we found a place sufficiently secure for the ships, and anchored half a league from land, on which we saw a very great number of people: and this same day we put to
land with the boats, and sprang on shore full 40 men in good trim: and still the land's
people appeared shy of converse with us, and we were unable to encourage them so much
as to make them come to speak with us: and this day we laboured so greatly in giving
them of our wares, such as rattles and mirrors, beads, spalline, and other trifles, that some
of them took confidence and came to discourse with us: and after having made good
friends with them, the night coming on, we took our leave of them and returned to the
ships: and the next day when the dawn appeared we saw that there were infinite numbers
of people upon the beach, and they had their women and children with them: we went,
ashore, and found that they were all laden with their worldly goods which are suchlike as,
in its place, shall be related: and before we reached the land, many of them jumped into
the sea and came swimming to receive us at a bowshot's length [from the shore], for they
are very great swimmers, with as much confidence as if they had for a long time been
acquainted with us: and we were pleased with this their confidence. For so much as we
learned of their manner of life and customs, it was that they go entirely naked, as well the
men as the women. . . . They are of medium stature, very well proportioned: their flesh is
of a colour the verges into red like a lion's mane: and I believe that if they went clothed,
they would be as white as we: they have not any hair upon the body, except the hair of
the head which is long and black, and especially in the women, whom it renders
handsome: in aspect they are not very good-looking, because they have broad faces, so
that they would seem Tartar-like: they let no hair grow on their eyebrows, nor on their
eyelids, nor elsewhere, except the hair of the head: for they hold hairiness to be a filthy
thing: they are very light footed in walking and in running, as well the men as the
women: so that a woman recks nothing of running a league or two, as many times we saw
them do: and herein they have a very great advantage over us Christians: they swim beyond all belief, and the women better than the men: for we have many times found and seen them swimming two leagues out at sea without anything to rest upon. Their arms are bows and arrows very well made, save that [the arrows] are not [tipped] with iron nor any other kind of hard metal: and instead of iron they put animals' or fishes' teeth, or a spike of tough wood, with the point hardened by fire: they are sure marksmen, for they hit whatever they aim at: and in some places the women use these bows: they have other weapons, such as fire-hardened spears, and also clubs with knobs, beautifully carved. Warfare is used amongst them, which they carry on against people not of their own language, very cruelly, without granting life to any one, except [to reserve him] for greater suffering. When they go to war, they take their women with them, not that these may fight, but because they carry behind them their worldly goods, for a woman carries on her back for thirty or forty leagues a load which no man could bear: as we have many times seen them do. They are not accustomed to have any Captain, nor do they go in any ordered array, for every one is lord of himself: and the cause of their wars is not for lust of dominion, nor of extending their frontiers, nor for inordinate covetousness, but for some ancient enmity which in by-gone times arose amongst them: and when asked why they made war, they knew not any other reason to give than that they did so to avenge the death of their ancestors, or of their parents: these people have neither King, nor Lord, nor do they yield obedience to any one, for they live in their own liberty: and how they be stirred up to go to war is (this) that when the enemies have slain or captured any of them, his oldest kinsman rises up and goes about the highways haranguing them to go with him and avenge the death of such his kinsman: and so are they stirred up by fellow-feeling:
they have no judicial system, nor do they punish the ill-doer: nor does the father, nor the mother chastise the children and marvelously [seldom] or never did we see any dispute among them: in their conversation they appear simple, and they are very cunning and acute in that which concerns them: they speak little and in a low tone: they use the same articulations as we, since they form their utterances either with the palate, or with the teeth, or on the lips: except that they give different names to things. Many are the varieties of tongues: for in every 100 leagues we found a change of language, so that they are not understandable each to the other. The manner of their living is very barbarous, for they do not eat at certain hours, and as often-times as they will: and it is not much of a boon to them that the will may come more at midnight than by day, for they eat at all hours: and they eat upon the ground without a table-cloth or any other cover, for they have their meats either in earthen basins which they make themselves, or in the halves of pumpkins: they sleep in certain very large nettings made of cotton, suspended in the air: and although this their sleeping may seem uncomfortable, I say that it is sweet to sleep in those: and we slept better in them than in the counterpanes. They are a people smooth and clean of body, because of so continually washing themselves as they do...

Amongst those people we did not learn that they had any law, nor can they be called Moors nor Jews, and [are] worse than pagans: because we did not observe that they offered any sacrifice: nor even had they a house of prayer: their manner of living I judge to be Epicurean: their dwellings are in common: and their houses made in the style of huts, but strongly made, and constructed with very large trees, and covered over with palm-leaves, secure against storms and winds: and in some places of so great breadth and length, that in one single house we found there were 600 souls: and we saw a village of
only thirteen houses where there were four thousand souls: every eight or ten years they change their habitations: and when asked why they did so: because of the soil which, from its filthiness, was already unhealthy and corrupted, and that it bred aches in their bodies, which seemed to us a good reason: their riches consist of bird's plumes of many colors, or of rosaries which they make from fishbones, or of white or green stones which they put in their cheeks and in their lips and ears, and of many other things which we in no wise value: they use no trade, they neither buy nor sell. In fine, they live and are contended with that which nature gives them. The wealth that we enjoy in this our Europe and elsewhere, such as gold, jewels, pearls, and other riches, they hold as nothing; and although they have them in their own lands, they do not labour to obtain them, nor do they value them. They are liberal in giving, for it is rarely they deny you anything: and on the other hand, liberal in asking, when they shew themselves your friends. . . .

When they die, they use divers manners of obsequies, and some they bury with water and victuals at their heads: thinking that they shall have to eat: they have not nor do they use ceremonies of torches nor of lamentation. In some other places, they use the most barbarous and inhuman burial, which is that when a suffering or infirm is as it were at the last pass of death, his kinsmen carry him into a large forest, and attach one of those nets, of theirs, in which they sleep, to two trees, and then put him in it, and dance around him for a whole day: and when the night comes on they place at his bolster, water with other victuals, so that he may be able to subsist for four or six days: and then they leave him alone and return to the village: and if the sick man helps himself, and eats, and drinks, and survives, he returns to the village, and his [friends] receive him with ceremony: but few are they who escape: without receiving any further visit they die, and
that is their sepulture: and they have many other customs which for prolixity are not related. They use in their sicklinesses various forms of medicines, so different from ours that we marvelled how any one escaped: for many times I saw that with a man sick of fever, when it heightened upon him, they bathed him from head to foot with a large quantity of cold water: then they lit a great fire around him, making him turn and turn again every two hours, until they tired him and left him to sleep, and many were (thus) cured: with this they make use of dieting, for they remain three days without eating, and also of blood-letting, but not from the arm, only from the thighs and the loins and the calf of the leg: also they provoke vomiting with their herbs which are put into the mouth: and they use many other remedies which it would be long to relate: they are much vitiated in the phlegm and in the blood because of their food which consists chiefly of roots of herbs, and fruits and fish: they have no seed of wheat nor other grain: and for their ordinary use and feeding, they have a root of a tree, from which they make flour, tolerably good, and they call it Iuca, and another which they call Cazabi, and another Ignami: they eat little flesh except human flesh: for your Magnificence must know that herein they are so inhuman that they outdo every custom of beasts; for they eat all their enemies whom they kill or capture, as well females as males with so much savagery, that to relate it appears a horrible thing: how much more so to see it, as, infinite times and in many places, it was my hap to see it: and they wondered to hear us say that we did not eat our enemies: and this your Magnificence may take for certain, that their other barbarous customs are such that expression is too weak for the reality: and as in these four voyages I have seen so many things diverse from our customs, I prepared to write a common-place-book which I name Le quattro Giornate: in which I have set down the greater part
of the things which I saw, sufficiently in detail, so far as my feeble wit has allowed me: which I have not yet published, because I have so ill a taste for my own things that I do not relish those which I have written, notwithstanding that many encourage me to publish it: therein everything will be seen in detail: so that I shall not enlarge further in this chapter: as in the course of the letter we shall come to many other things which are particular: let this suffice for the general. At this beginning, we saw nothing in the land of much profit, except some show of gold: I believe the cause of it was that we did not know the language: but in so far as concerns the situation and condition of the land, it could not be better: we decided to leave that place, and to go further on, continuously coasting the shore: upon which we made frequent descents, and held converse with a great number of people: and at the end of some days we went into a harbour where we underwent very great danger: and it pleased the Holy Ghost to save us: and it was in this wise. We landed in a harbour, where we found a village built like Venice upon the water: there were about 44 large dwellings in the form of huts erected upon very thick piles, and they had their doors or entrances in the style of drawbridges: and from each house one could pass through all, by means of the drawbridges which stretched from house to house: and when the people thereof had seen us, they appeared to be afraid of us, and immediately drew up all the bridges: and while we were looking at this strange action, we saw coming across the sea about 22 canoes, which are a kind of boats of theirs, constructed from a single tree: which came towards our boats, as they had been surprised by our appearance and clothes, and kept wide of us: and thus remaining, we made signals to them that they should approach us, encouraging them will every token of friendliness: and seeing that they did not come, we went to them, and they did not stay for us, but made to the land,
and, by signs, told us to wait, and that they should soon return: and they went to a hill in the background, and did not delay long: when they returned, they led with them 16 of their girls, and entered with these into their canoes, and came to the boats: and in each boat they put 4 of the girls. That we marvelled at this behavior your Magnificence can imagine how much, and they placed themselves with their canoes among our boats, coming to speak with us: insomuch that we deemed it a mark of friendliness: and while thus engaged, we beheld a great number of people advance swimming towards us across the sea, who came from the houses: and as they were drawing near to us without any apprehension: just then there appeared at the doors of the houses certain old women, uttering very loud cries and tearing their hair to exhibit grief: whereby they made us suspicious, and we each betook ourselves to arms: and instantly the girls whom we had in the boats, threw themselves into the sea, and the men of the canoes drew away from us, and began with their bows to shoot arrows at us: and those who were swimming each carried a lance held, as covertly as they could, beneath the water: so that, recognizing the treachery, we engaged with them, not merely to defend ourselves, but to attack them vigorously, and we overturned with our boats many of their almadie or canoes, for so they call them, we made a slaughter, and they all flung themselves into the water to swim, leaving their canoes abandoned, with considerable loss on their side, they went swimming away to the shore: there died of them about 15 or 20, and many were left wounded: and of ours 5 were wounded, and all, by the grace of God, escaped [death]: we captured two of the girls and two men: and we proceeded to their houses, and entered therein, and in them all we found nothing else than two old women and a sick man: we took away from them many things, but of small value: and we would not burn their
houses, because it seemed to us a burden upon our conscience: and we returned to our boats with five prisoners: and betook ourselves to the ships, and put a pair of irons on the feet of each of the captives, except the little girls: and when the night came on, the two girls and one of the men fled away in the most subtle manner possible: and next day we decided to quit that harbour and go further onwards: we proceeded continuously skirting the coast, we had sight of another tribe distant perhaps some 80 leagues from the former tribe: and we found them very different in speech and customs: we resolved to cast anchor, and went ashore with the boats, and we saw on the beach a great number of people amounting probably to 4000 souls: and when we had reached the shore, they did not stay for us, but betook themselves to flight through the forests, abandoning their things: we jumped on land, and took a pathway that led to the forest: and at the distance of a bow-shot we found their tents, where they had made very large fires, and two (of them) were cooking their victuals, and roasting several animals, and fish of many kinds: where we saw that they were roasting a certain animal which seemed to be a serpent, save that it had not wings, and was in its appearance so loathsome that we marvelled much at its savageness: Thus went we on through their houses, or rather tents, and found many of those serpents alive, and they were tied by the feet and had a cord around their snouts, so that they could not open their mouths, as is done [in Europe] with mastiff-dogs so that they may not bite: they were of such savage aspect that none of us dared to take one away, thinking that they were poisonous: they are of the bigness of a kid, and in length an ell and a half: their feet are long and thick, and armed with big claws: they have a hard skin, and are of various colors: they have the muzzle and face of a serpent: and from their snouts there rises a crest like a saw which extends along the middle of the back as far as
the tip of the tail: in fine we deemed them to be serpents and venomous, and ate them: we found that they made bread out of little fishes which they took from the sea, first boiling them, pounding them, and making thereof a paste, or bread, and they baked them on the embers: thus did they eat them: we tried it, and found that it was good: they had so many other kinds of eatables, and especially of fruits and roots, that it would be a large matter to describe them in detail: and seeing that the people did not return, we decided not to touch nor take away anything of theirs, so as better to reassure them: and we left in the tents for them many of our things, placed where they should see them, and returned by night to our ships: and the next day, when it was light, we saw on the beach an infinite number of people: and we landed: and although they appeared timorous towards us, they took courage nevertheless to hold converse with us, giving us whatever we asked of them: and shewing themselves very friendly towards us, they told us that those were their dwellings, and that they had come hither for the purpose of fishing: and they begged that we would visit their dwellings and villages, because they desired to receive us as friends: and they engaged in such friendship because of the two captured men whom we had with us, as these were their enemies: insomuch that, in view of such importunity on their part, holding a council, we determined that 28 of us Christians in good array should go with them, and in the firm resolve to die if it should be necessary: and after we had been here some three days, we went with them inland: and at three leagues from the coast we came to a village of many people and few houses, for there were no more than nine: where we were received with such and so many barbarous ceremonies that the pen suffices not to write them down: for there were dances, and songs, and lamentations mingled with rejoicing, and great quantities of food: and here we remained the night: . . . and after
having been here that night and half the next day, so great was the number of people who
came wondering to behold us that they were beyond counting: and the most aged begged
us to go with them to other villages which were further inland, making display of doing
us the greatest honor: wherefore we decided to go: and it would be impossible to tell you
how much honor they did us: and we went to several villages, so that we were nine days
journeying, so that our Christians who had remained with the ships were already
apprehensive concerning us: and when we were about 18 leagues in the interior of the
land, we resolved to return to the ships: and on our way back, such was the number of
people, as well men as women, that came with us as far as the sea, that it was a wondrous
thing: and if any of us became weary of the march, they carried us in their nets very
refreshingly: and in crossing the rivers, which are many and very large, they passed us
over by skilful means so securely that we ran no danger whatever, and many of them
came laden with the things which they had given us, which consisted in their sleeping-
ets, and very rich feathers, many bows and arrows, innumerable popinjays of divers
colors: and others brought with them loads of their household goods, and of animals: but
a greater marvel will I tell you, that, when we had to cross a river, he deemed himself
lucky who was able to carry us on his back: and when we reached the sea, our boats
having arrived, we entered into them: and so great was the struggle which they made to
get into our boats, and to come to see our ships, that we marveled: and in our boats we
took as many of them as we could, and made our way to the ships, and so many came
swimming that we found ourselves embarrassed in seeing so many people in the ships,
for there were over a thousand persons all naked and unarmed: they were amazed by our
gear and contrivances, and the size of the ships: and with them there occurred to us a very
laughable affair, which was that we decided to fire off some of our great guns, and when
the explosion took place, most of them through fear cast themselves to swim, not
otherwise than frogs on the margins of a pond, when they see something that frightens
them, will jump into the water, just so did those people: and those who remained in the
ships were so terrified that we regretted our action: however we reassured them by telling
them that with those arms we slew our enemies: and when they had amused themselves
in the ships the whole day, we told them to go away because we desired to depart that
night, and so separating from us with much friendship and love, they went away to land.
Amongst that people and in their land, I knew and beheld so many of their customs and
ways of living, that I do not care to enlarge upon them: for Your Magnificence must
know that in each of my voyages I have noted the most wonderful things, and I have
indited it all in a volume after the manner of a geography: and I entitle it Le Quattro
Giornate: in which work the things are comprised in detail, and as yet there is no copy of
it given out, as it is necessary for me to revise it. This land is very populous, and full of
inhabitants, and of numberless rivers, animals: few resemble ours, excepting lions,
panthers, stags, pigs, goats, and deer: and even these have some dissimilarities of form:
they have no horses nor mules, nor, saving your reverence, asses nor dogs, nor any kind
of sheep or oxen: but so numerous are the other animals which they have, and all are
savage, and of none do they make use for their service, that they could not be counted.
What shall we say of other birds which are so numerous, and of so many kinds, and of
such various-colored plumages, that it is a marvel to behold them. The soil is very
pleasant and fruitful, full of immense woods and forests: and it is always green, for the
foliage never drops off. The fruits are so many that they are numberless and entirely
different from ours. This land is within the torrid zone, close to or just under the parallel described by the Tropic of Cancer: where the pole of the horizon has an elevation of 23 degrees, at the extremity of the second climate. Many tribes came to see us, and wondered at our faces and our whiteness: and they asked us whence we came: and we gave them to understand that we had come from heaven, and that we were going to see the world, and they believed it. In this land we placed baptismal fonts, and an infinite people were baptized, and they called us in their language Carabi, which means men of great wisdom. We took our departure from that port: and the province is called Lariab: and we navigated along the coast, always in sight of land, until we had run 870 leagues of it, still going in the direction of the maestrale [northwest] making in our course many halts, and holding intercourse with many peoples: and in several places we obtained gold by barter but not much in quantity, for we had done enough in discovering the land and learning that they had gold. We had now been thirteen months on the voyage: and the vessels and the tackling were already much damaged, and the men worn out by fatigue: we decided by general council to haul our ships on land and examine them for the purpose of stanching leaks, as they made much water, and of caulking and tarring them afresh, and returning towards Spain: and when we came to this determination, we were close to a harbor the best in the world: into which we entered with our vessels: where we found an immense number of people: who received us with much friendliness: and on the shore we made a bastion with our boats and with barrels and casks, and our artillery, which commanded every point: and our ships having been unloaded and lightened, we drew them upon land, and repaired them in everything that was needful: and the land's people gave us very great assistance: and continually furnished us with their victuals: so
that in this port we tasted little of our own, which suited our game well: for the stock of provisions which we had for our return-passage was little and of sorry kind: where we remained 37 days: and went many times to their villages: where they paid us the greatest honor: and desiring to depart upon our voyage, they made complaint to us how at certain times of the year there came from over the sea to this their land, a race of people very cruel, and enemies of theirs: and [who] by means of treachery or of violence slew many of them, and ate them: and some they made captives, and carried them away to their houses, or country: and how they could scarcely contrive to defend themselves from them, making signs to us that were an island-people and lived out in the sea about a hundred leagues away: and so piteously did they tell us this that we believed them: and we promised to avenge them of so much wrong: and they remained overjoyed herewith: and many of them offered to come along with us, but we did not wish to take them for many reasons, save that we took seven of them, on condition that they should come afterwards in canoes because we did not desire to be obliged to take them back to their country: and they were contented: and so we departed from those people, leaving them very friendly towards us: and having repaired our ships, and sailing for seven days out to sea between northeast and east: and at the end of the seven days we came upon the islands, which were many, some inhabited, and others deserted: and we anchored at one of them: where we saw a numerous people who called it Iti: and having manned our boats with strong crews, and three cannon shots in each, we made for land: where we found about 400 men, and many women, and all naked like the former. They were of good bodily presence, and seemed right warlike men: for they were armed with their weapons, which are bows, arrows, and lances: and most of them had square wooden targets: and
bore them in such wise that they did not impede the drawing of the bow: and when we had come with our boats to about a bowshot of the land, they all sprang into the water to shoot their arrows at us and to prevent us from leaping upon shore: and they all had their bodies painted of various colors, and plumed with feathers: and the interpreters who were with us told us that when [they] displayed themselves so painted and plumed, it was to betoken that they wanted to fight: and so much did they persist in preventing us from landing, that we were compelled to play with our artillery: and when they heard the explosion, and saw one of them fall dead, they all drew back to the land: wherefore, forming our council, we resolved that 42 of our men should spring on shore, and, if they waited for us, fight them: thus having leaped to land with our weapons, they advanced towards us, and we fought for about an hour, for we had but little advantage of them, except that our arbalasters and gunners killed some of them, and they wounded certain of our men: and this was because they did not stand to receive us within reach of lance-thrust or sword-blow: and so much vigour did we put forth at last, that we came to sword-play, and when they tasted our weapons, they betook themselves to flight through the mountains and the forests, and left us conquerors of the field with many of them dead and a good number wounded: and for that day we took no other pains to pursue them, because we were very weary, and we returned to our ships, with so much gladness on the part of the seven men who had come with us that they could not contain themselves: and when the next day arrived, we beheld coming across the land a great number of people, with signals of battle, continually sounding horns, and various other instruments which they use in their wars: and all painted and feathered, so that it was a very strange sight to behold them: wherefore all the ships held council, and it was resolved that since this
people desired hostility with us, we should proceed to encounter them and try by every means to make them friends: in case they would not have our friendship, that we should treat them as foes, and so many of them as we might be able to capture should all be our slaves: and having armed ourselves as best we could, we advanced towards the shore, and they sought not to hinder us from landing, I believe from fear of the cannons: and we jumped on land, 57 men in four squadrons, each one [consisting of] a captain and his company: and we came to blows with them: and after a long battle many of them [were] slain, we put them to flight, and pursued them to a village, having made about 250 of them captives, and we burnt the village, and returned to our ships with victory and 250 prisoners, leaving many of them dead and wounded, and of ours there were no more than one killed and 22 wounded, who all escaped, God be thanked. We arranged our departure, and seven men, of whom five were wounded, took an island-canoe, and with seven prisoners that we gave them, four women and three men, returned to their country full of gladness, wondering at our strength: and we thereon made sail for Spain with 222 captive slaves: and reached the port of Calis (Cadiz) on the 15th day of October, 1498, where we were well received and sold our slaves. Such is what befell me, most noteworthy, in this my first voyage.