altogether to do with Faith. And if this had to be done, it is not at all to be wondered at that it was done with such consummate wisdom in divine Scripture.

Questions

1. What does Galileo suggest people should do when their reading of the Bible appears to conflict with evidence observed in nature? How does Galileo attempt to resolve any inconsistencies between his positions and those of church authorities?
2. What do you think Galileo was trying to accomplish with this letter?
3. What is significant about Galileo writing this letter to a woman, the Grand Duchess of Tuscany? What assumptions is Galileo making about his audience?

Chapter 12

Contact, Commerce, and Colonization, 1450s–1600

Christopher Columbus, On World Geography (late fifteenth century)

Christopher Columbus (c. 1451–1506) was born in Genoa, Italy, but achieved his fame sailing for Spain after several other kingdoms declined to back his venture. By the late fifteenth century, the spice routes eastward to Asia were dominated by Muslims and by Genoa's rival, Venice. Columbus was convinced that one could also reach Asia by sailing west across the uncharted Atlantic, thus bypassing these hostile powers. Contrary to a common belief today, Columbus was not unusual—at least among educated people—in realizing that the earth was round; note in the following excerpt that he takes this as obvious. While he failed to find a westward sea route to Asia, the bringing of the Americas into contact with Europe was one of the most consequential events in recorded history.

In all, Columbus made four voyages in search of a passage to Asia. He also served as a colonial governor in Hispaniola but was removed and arrested for committing various abuses. He was returned to Spain as a prisoner but freed after about six weeks.

I have always read that the world, land and water, was spherical, and authoritative accounts and the experiments which Ptolemy [ancient Greek geographer] and all the others have recorded

concerning this matter, so describe it and hold it to be, by the eclipses of the moon and by other demonstrations made from east to west, as well as from the elevation of the pole star from north to south. Now, as I have already said, I have seen so great irregularity that, as a result, I have been led to hold this concerning the world, and I find that it is not round as they describe it, but that it is the shape of a pear which is everywhere very round except where the stalk is, for there it is very prominent, or that it is like a very round ball, and on one part of it is placed something like a woman's nipple, and that this part, where this protuberance is found, is the highest and nearest to the sky, and it is beneath the equinoctial line and in this Ocean sea at the end of the East. I call that "the end of the East," where end all the land and islands.

* * *

Holy Scripture testifies that Our Lord made the earthly paradise and in it placed the tree of life, and from it issues a fountain from which flow four of the chief rivers of this world, the Ganges in India, the Tigris and Euphrates in * * *, which cut through a mountain range and form Mesopotamia and flow into Persia, and the Nile which rises in Ethiopia and enters the sea at Alexandria.

I do not find and I have never found any writing of the Romans or of the Greeks which gives definitely the position in the world of the earthly paradise, nor have I seen it in any world map, placed with authority based upon proof. Some placed it there where are the sources of the Nile in Ethiopia, but others traversed all these lands and found no similarity to it in the climate or in elevation towards the sky, to make it comprehensible that it was there, nor that the rising waters of the deluge had reached that place, &c [etc.]. Some Gentiles wished to show by arguments that it was in the Fortunate islands, which are the Canaries, &c. St. Isidore [of Seville] and Bede and [Walafridus] Strabo and the Master of Scholastic History [Petrus Comestor] and St. Ambrose and [Duns] Scotus and

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all the learned theologians agree that the earthly paradise is in the East, &c.

I have already said that which I hold concerning this hemisphere and its shape, and I believe that if I were to pass beneath the equinoctial line, then, arriving there at the highest point, I should find an even more temperate climate and difference in the stars and waters. Not that I believe that to the summit of the extreme point is navigable, or water, or that it is possible to ascend there, for I believe that the earthly paradise is there and to it, save by the will of God, no man can come.

Questions

1. What sources of geographic knowledge does Columbus draw on in this text? How does he decide among them?
2. Columbus does not believe that anyone can sail to the earthly paradise. Why do you think he discusses it in the context of navigation?
3. What does this document suggest to you about faith and reason in Columbus's thinking?

The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico (1519)

The Broken Spears is a Spanish translation of several accounts in Nahuatl of the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs in 1519. (A more accurate translation would actually be "The Broken Bones.") The earliest of these accounts seems to have been written in 1528, nine years after Cortés landed at Veracruz and seven years after the Aztec capital at Tenochtitlán fell.

The arrival of the Spanish on the coast led to intense debates about how to deal with them. Aztec society was far from united; in fact, indigenous allies were of great help to the vastly outnumbered Spanish. There was also disagreement over who the Spanish were. As this passage shows, some people thought Cortés was the fulfillment of a prophecy about an ancient god who would return to rule someday. In the passage just before this (not reprinted here), Emperor Moctezuma decides—against the will of