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POSTSCRIPT

A New Division of the Earth

by *François Bernier*

The following passage should have accompanied the article 'François Bernier and the Invention of Racial Classification', by Siep Stuurman, in History Workshop Journal 50, autumn 2000. It comes from François Bernier's essay 'New Year's Gift to Madame de La Sablière', which was published anonymously in the Journal des Sçavants, 24 April 1684, as 'Nouvelle Division de la Terre, par les différentes Espèces ou Race d'hommes qui l'habite, envoyée par un fameux Voyageur à M. l'Abbé de la Chambre . . .'

Translated by Janet L. Nelson.

THE DIVISION OF THE EARTH ACCORDING TO THE DIFFERENT TYPES OR RACES OF MEN WHO INHABIT IT

Hitherto, geographers have divided the Earth only into the different Countries or Regions therein; but my own observations among humankind during all my lengthy Travels have given me the idea of dividing it in another way. For although men are almost all distinct from one another as far as the external form of their bodies is concerned, especially their faces, according to the different areas of the world they live in, and while they differ so clearly that people who have travelled widely can thus often distinguish unerringly one nation from another, nevertheless I have observed that there are in all four or five Types of Race among men whose distinctive traits are so obvious that they can justifiably serve as the basis of a new division of the Earth.

Among the first type, I include France, Spain, England, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, and the whole of Europe in general except for part of Muscovy. To these can be added a small part of Africa, namely that between the kingdoms of Fez and Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli as far as the Nile, and likewise a large part of Asia, that is, the Empire of the Great Khan with the three Arabias, the whole of Persia, the realms of the Great Mogul, the Kingdom of Golconda, that of Bijapur, the Maldives, and part of the Kingdoms of Arakan, Pegu, Siam, Sumatra, Bantam and Borneo. For while the Egyptians, for instance, and the Indians are very dark, or rather sunburnt, this colouring is merely accidental for them, and results merely from the fact that they are exposed to the Sun – because those of them who protect themselves, and do not have to expose their skin as often as the Common People, are no darker than the Spaniards. It is true that most of the Indians are somewhat different from us in the shape of their faces and in a colouring that inclines them to the yellowish; but those traits

do not seem to me enough to warrant classifying them as a separate type: or rather, if they were thus classified, you would have to create another special type for the Spaniards, and another for the Germans, and so on for all the peoples of Europe.

Among the second type, I place the whole of Africa, except for the Coastal areas just mentioned. The following features justify considering the Africans a distinct type: (i) their thick lips and their snub noses, for very few of them have aquiline noses and medium-sized lips (ii) the blackness that is their essential trait and whose cause is not, as people think, the heat of the Sun – for if you transport a Black man and a Black woman to a cold country, their children will continue to be black and so will all their descendants until they intermarry with white women. The explanation for their distinct type must therefore be sought in their sperm and their blood, both of which are, however, the same colour as in all the other types (iii) their skin is quite oily, supple and polished, except for the areas roasted by the Sun (iv) their beards consist of only three or four strands (v) their hair is not truly hair but instead a sort of wool similar to the coat of one of our hunting-spaniels and (vi) their teeth are whiter than the finest ivory and the whole inside of their mouths, like their lips, is red as Coral.

The third type includes part of the Kingdoms of Arakan and Siam, part of the Islands of Sumatra and Borneo, the Philippines, Japan, the Kingdom of Pegu, Tonkin, Cochin-China, China, Tartary between China, the Ganges and Muscovy, Usbekistan, Turkestan, Tashkent, a small part of Muscovy, the little Tartars and the Turkomans who live along the upper Euphrates near Aleppo. The inhabitants of all those Countries are really white; but they usually have large shoulders, their faces are flat, they have snub noses, and their eyes are oval-shaped and come to a point at each corner.

The fourth type consists of the Lapps. They are little short men with fat legs, big shoulders, short necks and faces somehow elongated, terrifying-looking, resembling a bear's. I only ever saw two of them at Danzig. But according to pictures I have seen and reports given to me by a number of people who visited that Country, they are nasty creatures, nasty drinkers of fish-oil which they think better than all the nicest liquors in the world.

As far as the Americans are concerned, they are really mostly olive-skinned and their faces have a rather different shape from ours. Nevertheless I do not consider that that difference is so large as to warrant making them a special type distinct from our own.

Furthermore, as in our Europe, there are usually many differences between individuals as to height, the look of their faces, their colouring and their hair, just as occurs, so we said above, in the other parts of the World. For instance, the Blacks of the Cape of Good Hope seem to constitute a different type from those of the rest of Africa. They are usually smaller, thinner, with uglier faces; they are swift hunters, passionately fond of carrion-meat, which they eat raw, and they wind bits of the guts around their arms and necks, just as you can sometimes see our Butchers' dogs do, so as

to eat them later as need arises; and they drink sea-water when nothing else is available, and they speak a language which is very strange and almost impossible for Europeans to imitate. Some Dutchmen say they speak Turkey-Cock.

What I have observed as regards the beauty of women is no less differentiated. Certainly, there are lovely ones and ugly ones to be found everywhere. I have seen some real beauties in Egypt, which put me in mind of the fair and famed Cleopatra. Among the Blacks of Africa I have also seen some very beautiful women who did not have thick lips and snub noses. I have encountered seven or eight in various places who were of such an astonishing beauty that they put in the shade the Venus of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome – with aquiline nose, small mouth, coral lips, ivory teeth, large bright eyes, gentle features, and a bosom and everything else of utter perfection. At Moka I saw several of them completely naked, waiting to be sold, and I can tell you, there could be nothing lovelier in the world to see – but they were extremely expensive because they were being sold at three times the price of the others.

I have also seen some very beautiful women in the Indies: they could be termed lovely Brown ones. Among them are some whose colouring inclines only to very light yellow: these women are highly valued and I found them very much to my liking too. For this slight yellowishness is bright and sparkling, quite different from the nasty livid pallor of someone with jaundice. Imagine a beautiful young daughter of France who has just contracted jaundice – but instead of her sick, pallid face, and her yellowish, faded, listless eyes, think of her having a healthy, soft and smiling face with beautiful, bright eyes full of love: that is something like the idea I want to give you.

The Indians rightly aver that there are no beautiful women in Countries where the water is bad and where the land is not plentiful and fertile. There can be no doubt that high quality of water and of foodstuffs contributes a great deal to beauty. Yet it is not universally the case that where those two conditions converge the women are always beautiful. That depends in my view on a number of other conditions whose combined outcome is that beauty is more rare and is dispersed in relatively small areas. It does not result, therefore, only from water, food, land and air, but also from the nature of semen which must vary with specific races and types.

The women on the Ganges at Benares and downriver towards Bengal are generally highly rated. The women of the Kingdom of Kashmir are still more so, for not only are they white like women in Europe but they have a sweetness of face and are of admirable height, and from Kashmir come the women at the Court of the Mogul and those whom all the Great Khans have about them. I recall that when we were on our way back from that Country, we actually saw little girls being carried across the mountains on men's shoulders in basket-like containers. But although the girls of Lahore are brown, as are other Indian women, they still seemed to me more delightful than all the others; their figures, which are nice and small and alluring, and

the sweetness of their faces, are much lovelier still than those of the Kashmiri women.

The women who are natives of Persia could not be called beautiful; but that does not mean that the City of Istvahan is not full of an infinite number of lovely women, and also of handsome men, thanks to the great numbers of beautiful slave-women brought there from Georgia and Circassia.

The Turks also have many very beautiful women, because apart from those who are natives of the country, who are not ugly, they have those Greek beauties of whom you have so often heard tell, and in addition a prodigious quantity of Slaves who reach them from Mingrelia, Georgia and Circassia, where, in the opinion of all the men from the Levant and of all Travellers, the loveliest women in the world are to be found. Moreover, at Constantinople, it is forbidden for Christians and Jews to buy a slave from Circassia: They are reserved only for Turks. When our friend M. le Chevalier Chardin talks about them – and he travelled in their Country – he is enchanted, and he asserts that, generally speaking, all of them are beautiful, and that in all his travels he has never seen anything so lovely. I will not say anything to you about the beauties of Europe, since you doubtless know as much about them as I do, or more.