

# Medieval Travels and the Ensuing Texts as Mirrors of a Society, a Culture, and a World View<sup>1</sup>

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For many years, despite all the evidence resulting from the wide circulation and mobility in the centuries of transition from the Roman world to the Medieval one,<sup>3</sup> from the expansion of Islam, the Nordic incursions to the East and West, the Crusades, the missionary campaigns,<sup>4</sup> and most of all, the Christian pilgrimages which

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<sup>3</sup> On the subject of the practice of travel, as well as circulation and mobility, at the end of the Roman Empire and in the early medieval centuries, see the nuclear study of M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims. Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300-800* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). In essence, this study explores a broad intersection of early monastic practices and itinerancy. In other words, it reveals the development of ascetic travel between the fourth and eighth centuries. Always contextualizing and substantiating, Dietz provides several important examples of travellers who crossed the contemporary paths, terrestrial and maritime, especially for religious reasons (in particular the wandering monks – gyrovague – and pilgrims, who then travelled along the ancient Roman roads, especially towards the Holy Land and the sacred places of biblical tradition). It should also be noted that throughout her analysis, Dietz refers to an important innovative bibliography on these issues. On the same subject, but covering an earlier chronology (the pre-Christian world, namely Greek and Roman), see also the study of J. Kuuliala and J. Rantala ed., *Travel, Pilgrimage and Social Interaction from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2020). In particular pages 1-14.

<sup>4</sup> The Medieval origins of Latin Christianity are largely associated with successive campaigns of evangelization and missionary movements. Carried out by itinerant clergy, they contributed to the annexation to the Catholicism of Mediterranean and urban roots, of vast rural areas of Europe and kingdoms and communities formerly situated, partly or entirely, outside the former Christian Roman Empire, from the British Isles to Poland and Hungary, passing through Scandinavia and Germany. Without the dislocations of clerics, who used Latin as the common language in the different countries, and the same holy texts as reference, Western Medieval civilization would not have been structured

continuously crossed through the heterogeneous spaces of Christianity,<sup>5</sup> the Middle Ages were not perceived as a period of circulation, mobility, or travel, especially covering long distances. This was a historiographic issue often addressed in the context of the study of Modernity, whereby the Middle Ages were seen as a predominantly rural period. Furthermore, from a perspective of long-duration, it was thought that the great fragility of urban life and of medium and long-distance commercial exchanges did not encourage dislocations.

However, in recent years, several studies have helped mitigate this excessively aprioristic vision, both in terms of social practices and of the imaginary. Historians have increasingly demonstrated how, especially in the Late Middle Ages, Western society saw an intense circulation of people, objects, models, and ideas, and today there is a vast amount of

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and established. Good examples, among many others, are those provided by the Roman monk Augustine of Canterbury (early sixth century-604), whom Pope Gregory the Great had sent to the Anglo-Saxons as a missionary in 596 (he is considered the “Apostle to the English” and a founder of the English Church); by Boniface (672-754), the Anglo-Saxon martyr and German missionary (he was a leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire during the eighth century, true hostile lands); by Columba of Iona (521-597), an Irish abbot and missionary evangelist credited with spreading Christianity in what is today Scotland at the start of the Hiberno-Scottish mission; and by the famous Martin of Tours (c. 316-397), who travelled and preached especially through western Gaul. As Maribel Dietz refers, “Missionary travel, voyages to spread Christianity to non-Christians, reaches back to the earliest days of the church and was responsible for a great deal of religious movement at that time. Indeed, most of the movement in the first three centuries of the church was linked to missionary endeavours. Members of the early church were highly mobile, travelling from city to city; this mobility, as many historians have argued, helped to spread Christianity throughout the Mediterranean. (...) In the late sixth century, papal initiation of missionary travel would begin to have an impact in northern Europe.” M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, 25-26. See also Ian N. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> The extensive medieval geography of holy places, within, and sometimes beyond Christianity, generated numerous pilgrimages, which resulted in the organization and establishment of a vast network of roads that were used by medieval travellers, including non-pilgrims. Some of these road systems have survived until today, as demonstrated by the many routes leading to Santiago of Compostela. See J. Richard, *Les récits de voyages et de pèlerinages* [Travel and pilgrimage accounts] (Turnhout: Brépols, 1981), *I Congresso Internacional dos Caminhos Portugueses de Santiago de Compostela* [I International Congress of the Portuguese Paths of Santiago of Compostela] (Lisboa: Edições Távola Redonda, 1992).

research available about individuals who set out on journeys, a human group so wide and diversified that it is transversal to contemporaneity.<sup>6</sup>

It should be pointed out that it is reductive to resort to the traditional notion of a rupture, on the one hand, between the Roman Empire and the so-called Middle Ages (even because in the East, the same empire did not end), on the other hand between the Medieval world, seen as a period of darkness, and the subsequent Modern Age, entirely diverse, in the middle of which is that purifying bridge called Renaissance. Jacob Burckhardt's nineteenth-century interpretation of the Renaissance, and consequently of the Medieval period, has long since become outdated. As Jacques Le Goff points out:

That period of transition, which the Age of Enlightenment designated as the *Dark Ages*, was, since the beginning, defined by the expression 'Middle Ages' – a derogatory concept – like a period that was, if not negative, at least inferior to the one that followed it. [...] This chronological and derogatory definition of the Middle Ages has, for several decades, and especially in recent years, come under attack by the two extremes [...]. The Middle Ages/Renaissance polarity is contested in many aspects. [...] The past undoubtedly objects when we try control and tame it with

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<sup>6</sup> See, among others, A. T. Serstevens, *Los precursores de Marco Polo* [Marco Polo's forerunners] (Barcelona: Orbis, 1986), *Travel and travellers of the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Newton (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), B. Fick, *Los libros de viajes en la España medieval* [Travel books in medieval Spain] (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1976), E. Aznar Vallejo, *Viajes y descubrimientos en la Edad Media* [Travel and discoveries in the Middle Ages] (Madrid: Síntesis, 1994), J. P. Roux, *Les explorateurs au Moyen Age* [Explorers in the Middle Ages] (Paris: Fayard, 1985), J. R. S. Phillips, *La expansión medieval de Europa* [The medieval expansion of Europe] (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), J. Verdon, *Voyager au Moyen Age* [Travelling in the Middle Ages] (Paris: Perrin, 1998), J. Rubio Tovar, *Libros españoles de viajes medievales* [Spanish medieval travel books] (Madrid: Taurus, 1986), J. Á. García de Cortázar, *Los viajeros medievales* [Medieval Travellers] (Madrid: Santillana, 1996), M. Mollat, *Los exploradores del siglo XIII al XVI: primeras miradas sobre nuevos mundos* [Explorers from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century: first glances at new worlds] (Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990), M. A. Ladeno Quesada, *El mundo de los viajeros medievales* [The world of medieval travellers] (Madrid: Anaya, 1992), N. Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1998), *Voyages et voyageurs au Moyen Age – XXVI<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la SHMES Limoges-Aubazine, mai 1995* [Travels and travellers in the Middle Ages – XXVI<sup>th</sup> SHMES Limoges-Aubazine Congress, May 1995] (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996).

periodization. Certain divisions are, however, more lacking in fundament than others as evidence of change. The designation of Renaissance does not seem pertinent to me. Most of the characterizing signs which have been used to identify it appeared long before the period that we apply it to (15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries).<sup>7</sup>

It is important to be cognizant of the tenuousness of broad stagnant classifications and periodisations, namely concerning topics such as travel/circulation/mobility and the ensuing written work. *Continuity* is, more than ever, an irrefutable and operative element for any solid attempt at historical hermeneutics, particularly in terms of culture and mentalities. It is thus impossible for new practices, and political, cultural, or religious guidelines to be manifested without considering the legacy of previous centuries. The coexistence of techniques, ideas, styles, models, and tastes was a fact.<sup>8</sup>

An excellent example is offered by the continuity that occurred between the Roman world and the Middle Ages in terms of the ancient network of Roman roads being used by Medieval people. Indeed, the road system built over centuries by the Romans continued to be widely used after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the last quarter of the fifth century.

This was largely due to the fact that the nature, meaning, and perception of travel and of travellers changed during late antiquity. Refugees, Christian officials, women, and monks joined the ranks of the soldiers, Roman officials, merchants, and messengers who traditionally made up the majority of Roman travellers. This led to an increase in the

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<sup>7</sup> J. Le Goff, *O Imaginário Medieval* [The Medieval Imaginary] (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1994), 20.

<sup>8</sup> History is continuous, as António José Saraiva points out: “Not that new and miraculous entities had taken the stage or changed the substance of things. In reality, none of the facts that we pointed out can be considered precedents. (...) The Renaissance is the result of a historical process that began in the heart of the feudal world. (...) It would therefore be a mistake to think that the Renaissance is a miraculous eruption of forces generated from nothing; and it would be a mistake to also perceive it as a finished, uniform entity, independent of space and time.” Likewise, Jean Delumeau feels that the idea that “a violent break separated the dark ages from the period of light” is completely wrong. A. J. Saraiva, *História da Cultura em Portugal* [History of Culture in Portugal] (vol. II, Lisboa: Jornal do Fôro, 1953), 16-17; J. Delumeau, *A Civilização do Renascimento* [The Civilization of the Renaissance] (Lisboa, Edições 70, 2004), 9.

number of travellers (in general) at that time and in the following years, despite the extreme difficulties and the hostile environment (especially at the political-military level).

Many travellers of those times of change were on the road not by their own choice, but in flight from the upheaval and turmoil – especially at the level of the urban scene – resulting from Germanic migrations. As refugees headed first into Africa, and later, after the Vandal invasions, eastward to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Greece, and Asia Minor, which were still under Roman control, long-distance travel increased dramatically, and upheaval and displacement became a way of life. Therefore, it is worth noting that the migrations of the Germanic peoples, which caused the displacement of native Roman inhabitants, only served to increase the general itinerant character of society in this time of transition.

Travel was an integral part of Roman identity and culture because travel had played an essential role in Roman society from its beginning. The empire was created through conquest but kept together through communication, colonization, and the presence of the Roman legionaries. Roads made an early appearance in this culture as a means of strengthening the cohesion of the conquered territories (the provinces). Thus, movement existed at the heart of the Roman world since the moment it started to expand, with great relevance during the Republic and the Empire. Such a powerful phenomenon could not simply disappear, even because, despite the hostile environment for circulation, after the fall of imperial Rome, the physical structures were still available to make use of them. In another fundamental perspective, that of memory, the enduring remains of the vast Roman road system therefore serve as a physical reminder of the importance of travel in the Roman civilization.

On the other hand, based on the same postulate, in the medieval twilight, the culture of movement did not simply appear out of nowhere. In fact, it was present throughout the Middle Ages, having experienced a natural increase in the final centuries, due in large part to the opening atmosphere of the time, as well as to the economic growth and generalized development, which took place mainly in Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Castile, Aragon).

What stands out more than the practice of travelling *per se*, is how the world is perceived as the object of a profound transformation throughout these centuries of change. Furthermore, the question here is

not a momentary and superficial transformation – one associated with a short time, an event, an individual, that is, a history of short-duration (*événementielle*).<sup>9</sup> Nor is it a history of medium amplitude, cyclical “from the cycle to the ‘intercycle’ – which offers us the choice of a decade, a quarter of a century, and lastly, the half century of Kondratiev’s classic cycle.”<sup>10</sup> It is, instead, an ontological mutation, of great movements, that overturns and substitutes the foundations of the mental framework, and, consequently, of the structures of the imaginary, which are thus irreversibly altered. That mutation which Braudel talks about when he evokes the history of “secular amplitude”<sup>11</sup> and the “great permanencies,”<sup>12</sup> that is, “history of long, and even very long duration.”<sup>13</sup>

In this regard, Georges Duby points out that:

it is convenient to apply to the study of mentalities the outline proposed by Fernand Braudel which suggests that we should identify different levels of the past, especially three great frequencies of duration – in other words, three histories [...]. Micro-history, ‘heedful of short time, of the individual, of the event’, history of small pieces of evidence and dramas, that of the surface; history with oscillations of medium amplitude divided into segments of several decades, which we could call ‘cyclical’ [...]; more in-depth history, ‘of long, even very long duration’, which covers centuries.<sup>14</sup>

## I. Who travelled?

Like the period itself that serves as a background, the sociology of medieval travellers is hugely diverse. Apart from large groups – noblemen, clerics, and countless merchants from emerging European

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<sup>9</sup> Fernand Braudel calls it “a short time, commensurable with individuals, daily life, our illusions, our rapidly growing awareness.” F. Braudel, *História e Ciências Sociais* [History and Social Sciences] (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1990), 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Idem*, *Gramática das Civilizações* [Grammar of Civilizations] (Lisboa: Teorema, 1989), 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*, *História e Ciências Sociais* [History and Social Sciences], 10.

<sup>14</sup> G. Duby, *Para uma História das Mentalidades* [Towards a History of Mentalities] (Lisboa: Terramar, 1999), 34-35.

cities between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries<sup>15</sup> – there is an immense gallery of subtypes: wandering or itinerant monks (both male and female), students, pilgrims, missionaries, warriors, robbers, second-born sons of noble families seeking their fortune, monks circulating between monasteries and often carrying that Medieval treasure that were books, messengers, minstrels, professional freight forwarders (*almocreves* in Portuguese), peasants, officials, craftsmen, explorers, paupers, fugitives, even vagabonds, and many others. All of them, to one degree or another, contributed to feed and make up the extensive human framework that comprised the mobility and circulation that were inherent to daily life in the twilight of the Middle Ages and early years of Modernity. Furthermore, they were all, at some point, simultaneously or separately, pilgrims searching for the sanctuaries and relics that allowed them to attain celestial blessings and protection.

## **II. The journey and the sacrosanct**

How was said, late antique and early medieval migrations left a new atmosphere in which travel and dislocation were commonplace. In this context, in which the practice of paths becomes part of the experience of many Christians, it was inevitable that the phenomenon of travel would be impregnated with religious significance (it was in this scenario that monastic men and women began to explore the ascetic qualities of the pilgrimage itself). Travel and Christianity were henceforth inextricably interconnected:

it became in many respects more difficult and more dangerous, and the stresses that this shift created caused a deep transformation in attitudes toward travel. Rather than being regarded as a desperate condition, wandering and homelessness could now be infused with meaning, including

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<sup>15</sup> One of the structuring changes introduced by the Renaissance in the twelfth century was the revival and reorganization of an entire network of commercial routes. From this reformist century onwards, cities, with their flourishing economic and social dynamism, broke away from the rigid frames of a predominantly rural society and became, concurrently, the main centres for cultural advancement. See J. Le Goff, “La fonction économique,” in *Histoire de la France Urbaine. La ville médiévale* [History of Urban France. The medieval town], dir. G. Duby (vol. II, Paris: Seuil, 1980), 241-261, idem, “O renascimento urbano,” in *A Civilização do Ocidente Medieval* vol. I [The Civilization of the Medieval West] (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1992), 102-109.

religious meaning. Those were the factors in late antique and early medieval travel.<sup>16</sup>

In short, at the same time when circulation became more common, travel gained a new spiritual dimension determined precisely by the conditions of reality (travellers were exposed to a variety of dangers, and difficulties).<sup>17</sup>

So it is legitimate to say that the intimate connection between Christianity and human circulation has its roots in the last centuries of the Roman Empire, extending into the beginning of the Middle Ages. Specifically, monasticism in this period was itself a loosely defined, multifaceted phenomenon that incorporated a wide variety of ascetic practices, namely absence of a commonly accepted paradigm of monastic behaviour and a variety of forms of religious travel. In fact, monasticism as a phenomenon closely linked to the practice of travel was born in this broad transition period: to a large extent, the origins and development of Christian religious travel in the West have their beginnings precisely in the travelling monks, both male and female:

Though pilgrimage is a more familiar mode of Christian religious travel, and the one that eventually eclipsed all others, it was in a monastic milieu that religious travel first claimed an essential place within Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims. Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300-800*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> “And yet the physical aspects and logistics of making a long journey provide the necessary context in understanding the concerns and experiences of individual travellers as well as how travel and movement itself could acquire religious and spiritual meaning. This does not mean that all late antique travel came to have a religious motive or is open to a religious interpretation; on the contrary, most travellers during late antiquity were the migrating tribes and Roman refugees. However, many there were, religious travellers were only a small fraction of the total. Commerce, military campaigns, imperial business, communication, migration, and displacement were among the principal motives of those who crowded the roads and waterways of the late antique and early medieval Mediterranean basin. But travel, like other aspects of late antique Roman society, began to have a Christian dimension, one that would allow for religious travel and movement as an ascetic practice.” Ibidem, 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 2.

In essence, men and women,<sup>19</sup> such as those monks, travelled and promoted travel for religious reasons, as a form of monasticism, with the belief that there was spiritual meaning in the itineracy itself.

What characterized most of these early Christian religious travels was that they did not concentrate on a particular sacred place. Rather, they were a practical way of visiting holy people alive and dead, and a means of religious expression of homelessness and temporal exile:

Travel was viewed as an imitation of the life of Christ, a literal rendering of the life of a Christian, a life only ‘temporarily on this earth.’ One was a wanderer until death, and with death eternal life in the Christian’s true homeland, heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup>

Although the practice of pilgrimage changed in the late Medieval period – starting to relate more to the world of lay people and due to the passage on monastic travel to the prevailing notion of monasticism as stability –, this idea of perpetual pilgrimage and that all Christians were always temporary sojourners on earth, because true home was in the heavenly paradise, will remain until the end of the Middle Ages. In fact, the man of the Late Middle Ages considered himself a *Homo Viator*, that is, someone who travelled the *road* from birth to his moment of death. He was an entity that became physical at birth and whose purpose was to *experience* some years of earthly life before joining God. This was the teaching of the Church, the supreme authority, so no one questioned the provisional character of their earthly existence. A person’s condition was immediately and ontologically that of a *pilgrim*. And their life was a *pilgrimage*.

For all this, the medieval journey<sup>21</sup> transcended the dimension of a mere dislocation motivated by profane preoccupations and needs. Although these aspirations were present in all the travellers, they eventually merged with, or became subordinate to spiritual and religious

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<sup>19</sup> Maribel alert to the role of women in early Christian travel, as travellers and patrons. From her perspective, for women, monasticism offered an alternative to marriage or remarriage, as well as a way of fulfilling a religious vocation in a world where they were increasingly barred from leadership positions in the church. One of the most expressive female cases that the author presents is that of the Iberian Egeria (fourth century). Ibidem, passim, but especially 107-154.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, all of it, from High to Late Middle Ages.

objectives, with the result that the traveller saw the itineraries as a sacred quest, and ultimately, as a chance of being absolved of his sins and saving his soul. From the demands of the gyrovagues<sup>22</sup> that characterized monastic life in the early Medieval centuries – until the moment when the *Regula Benedictina* finally extinguished its flame – to the innumerable military actions in the Orient that were part of the imperial plan of the Portuguese king Manuel I (1495-1521)<sup>23</sup>, which included the chimerical (re)conquest of Jerusalem, passing through the several Crusades and the Portuguese conquest of Ceuta in 1415<sup>24</sup>, there are many examples in which this spirit is present.

From another angle, piety was an important element to ensure the safety of travellers during their journeys. Consequently, travel narratives, both from the Middle Ages and from early Modernity often combined information resulting from the observation of reality and experience with the transcendental, marvellous or fantastic elements that travellers encountered, challenged, or overcame. In the forest of symbols, where roads were often transformed, the marks that threatened or protected those who ventured into them were remembered, insistently, helping them to find the powers with which to avert both the anxiety and fear caused by the *Other*, and the chaos and danger implicit in that encounter<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Wandering or itinerant monks without fixed residence or leadership, who relied on charity and the hospitality of others.

<sup>23</sup> Nicknamed *the Venturous*, King Manuel I was the last medieval king of Portugal and the first European Christian monarch to have agents acting on four continents simultaneously. See J. P. O. Costa, *D. Manuel I (1469-1521), Um Príncipe do Renascimento* [D. Manuel I (1469-1521), A Prince of the Renaissance] (Lisboa: Temas e Debates, 2007), 255-261 and 369-372, L. F. Thomaz, “Cruzada,” in *Dicionário de História Religiosa de Portugal* [Portuguese Religious History Dictionary] (vol. c-i, Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 2000), 31-38, idem, “L’ Idée Impériale Manuéline,” in *La Découverte, le Portugal et L’Europe. Actes -du Colloque* [Discovery, Portugal and Europe. Conference proceedings], ed. Jean Aubin (Paris: Centre Culturel Portugais, 1990), 35-103.

<sup>24</sup> An action that inaugurates the European Christian presence in North West Africa after the eclipse of the conquests of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian’s (527-565) in that region.

<sup>25</sup> For a more in-depth understanding of the subject of the medieval mentality, particularly regarding travel, see C. Deluz, “Partir c’est mourir un peu. Voyage et déracinement dans la société médiévale,” in *Voyages et voyageurs au Moyen Age – XXVI<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la SHMES Limoges-Aubazine, mai 1995* [Travels and travellers in the Middle Ages – XXVI<sup>th</sup> SHMES Limoges-Aubazine Congress, May 1995] (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 291-303, C. Lecouteux, *Au-delà du merveilleux, Essai sur les mentalités du*

In a civilization where rurality was still a powerful foundation (although in the final centuries it started to lose ground to an urban-mercantile world), travelling often involved a prolonged rupture with the practices and values of daily life. Therefore, seeking divine protection was essential to confront the problems and fears that might arise during a journey, and was often equally important as the careful choice of timing and resources – all the truer in relation to the universe of maritime voyages from the 1420s onwards.<sup>26</sup>

In this context, whether it involved a peasant's daily journey to toil on the land of his lord, or a pilgrimage to Compostela or the Holy Land,

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*Moyen Âge* [Beyond the marvelous, Essay on mentalities of the Middle Ages] (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), H. Martin, *Mentalités médiévales, XIème-XVème siècle* [Medieval mentalities, eleventh-fifteenth century] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 127-239, J. R. S. Phillips, *La Expansión Medieval de Europa* [The medieval expansion of Europe], 227-247, J. Verdon, *Voyager au Moyen Âge* [Travelling in the Middle Ages], 331-344.

<sup>26</sup> From the early fifteenth century onwards, Christian Europe was technically ready to contact the civilizational *Other* and new, unknown parts of the world, those which the classical tradition evoked and fabled about. The ocean, which was considered endless, a prime space of chaos and death, whose limits were unknown, started to be envisioned from a different perspective, more as an area that merely separated the familiar from the unfamiliar. Curiosity grew and provoked a desire to unveil its mysteries. And the men of the sea began to progressively confront the vast blue expanse, despite all of its dangers and tragedies. It was reminiscent of the fulfilment of Seneca's prophecy (4 BC-65 AD) in Medea: "Centuries will come in which the Ocean will open its barriers and new lands will appear; Tethys will discover new orbs [...]" Séneca, *Medeia* (São Paulo: Editora Abril, 1973), 123. But fears were not dispelled easily. The weight of traditions was pervading and reinforced by the direct and brutal contact with the oceanic reality – storms, the night, shipwrecks, thirst and hunger that led to insanity on the high seas. As technology and political and economic plans progressed it, became possible to sail long distances, although this brought a new scenario of danger, and obviously, a new load of imaginary, which invariably required invoking divine protection. To deepen the subject of fear of the sea see J. Delumeau, *História do Medo no Ocidente 1300-1800* [History of Fear in the West 1300-1800] (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001), L. Krus, "O imaginário português e os medos do mar," in *A descoberta do homem e do mundo* [The discovery of man and the of the world], org. Adauto Novaes (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998), 95-105, idem, "Primeiras imagens do mar: entre o Desejo e o Medo," in *A arte e o mar* [Art and the sea] (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1998), 29-39, J. Mattoso, "O imaginário marítimo medieval," in *Obras Completas José Mattoso. Vol. I. Naquele Tempo – Ensaaios de História Medieval* [Complete Works of José Mattoso. Vol. I. At that time – Medieval History Essays] (Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 2000), 231-244, idem, "O mar a descobrir," *ibidem*, 219-229, idem, "Os antepassados dos navegadores," *ibidem*, 245-264.

or a sea voyage to the South Atlantic, Medieval travelling required special material, and spiritual care which varied according to the distances, motivations, aspirations and economic resources of the different social groups.

It is therefore unquestionable that the medieval man, in particular the one who lived in the already pointed great periods of transition, travelled much more than has been presumed. Sometimes separately, but especially in groups, we know that individuals travelled the roads inside and outside of Western Christianity, exchanging experiences, techniques, knowledge, and ideas, which all contributed to the progressive establishment of a civilization with very different and differentiated characteristics and values from others with which they coexisted in time and space.

Had it not been for travelling, the genesis and the affirmation of the Christian West would not have been possible, which is why the Middle Ages (in particular, we insist, the centuries of transition, first with the Roman world then with Early Modernity) were in no way synonymous to an impermeable universe sustained by a sedentary and crystallized society, that is, closed in on itself and adverse to progress and innovation. On the contrary, this was a time and space marked by intense human dislocation involving both short distances and extensive itineraries: on the roads and maritime routes people went from place to place to wage war or engage in commerce, to preach or go on pilgrimages, to exercise justice or to escape it, to go into exile, to carry out diplomatic missions with foreign powers, or to proselytize. In short, there were almost as many reasons to travel as there were occupations.<sup>27</sup>

### *The centrality of pilgrimage*

Hereupon it is mandatory to highlight the centrality that the phenomenon of pilgrimage assumed throughout all the Middle Ages in the different social groups – Christians, Muslims, and Hebrews – and very particularly in terms of the religious and spiritual dimension (this without forgetting the implications and the scope it had in various activities of daily life, namely in the economic field). Indeed, in the Medieval centuries the paradigm of travel with a religious motivation it

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<sup>27</sup> J. Aurell, “El nuevo medievalismo y la interpretación de los textos históricos,” *Hispania, Revista Española de Historia* 224 (2006): 809-832.

is, without a doubt, the pilgrimage. However, as with monasticism, a phenomenon that initially went hand in hand with the pilgrimage, it is a term that has undergone an evolution at the semantic level (we have, moreover, come to observe how the notion of pilgrimage was more open in the first centuries of the Middle Ages in relation to what came to mean later). Thus, using the concept in the same way for the High and Late Middle Ages is an anachronistic exercise. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between both aspects.

The notions of *peregrinus* and *peregrinatio* that, roughly speaking, between the eighth and eleventh centuries were established and consolidated,<sup>28</sup> often had the consequence of changing the original meaning of the words and the underlying practices, not reproducing the phenomenon as it actually occurred at the end of the ancient world and in the medieval dawn.<sup>29</sup> The Christian pilgrimage has its roots in the biblical tradition and started as a practice in the early church, then remained a relatively unchanging activity, insofar as it was somehow independent of the temporal, geographical and cultural contexts.

However, at a given moment it gained other connotations, becoming crystallized in the fixed notion of a devotee, above all a layman, who embarks on a religious journey towards a particular sacred place (being the main motivations the search for a cure, the absolution of sins or the payment of a promise<sup>30</sup>). In this context, it is a temporary journey, organized with a permanent return in mind, sometimes with souvenirs of the place visited. The pilgrimage to Santiago of Compostela, to evoke just a very demonstrative example, fits almost absolutely into these parameters. Now, in relation to the act of ancient pilgrimage, that is, that of the classical world and the beginnings of medieval times, things happened in a different, more flexible way. The question is that, in these

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<sup>28</sup> A process largely related to Cluny and the Gregorian Reformation. See note 35.

<sup>29</sup> On pilgrimage in general during this period, see D. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), D. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, A.D. 312-460* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1977), M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, P. Maraval, *Lieux Saints et pèlerinages d'Orient: Histoire et Géographie des Origines à la Conquête Arabe* [Holy Places and Eastern Pilgrimages: History and Geography from the Origins to the Arab Conquest] (Paris: Cerf, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Not to mention the pilgrimage on behalf of third parties (including posthumously), that is, by proxy, almost always for the same reasons.

most indented centuries (and close to the original model), the word *peregrinatio* referred most of the time to the notion of “journey” – to mention that another Latin word commonly used to describe travel was *iter*, also meaning “journey”; for example the late fourth-century traveller to the Holy Land and beyond, Egeria, used *iter* repeatedly to describe her journey<sup>31</sup>– and, in turn, *peregrinus* to the notions of traveller and / or foreigner. In practice, this means that figures such as the gyrovagues, who travelled almost permanently, and other Christian personalities who took part in religious journeys of various kinds were considered pilgrims and their demands were pilgrimages<sup>32</sup>. Pilgrimage in this most indented period assumed, therefore, a more open connotation, relating to different types of religious travel – itineration’s always related to the Church and the religious world, but carried out for different reasons, that not just spiritual wandering; namely, institutional and representative travels such as journeys to councils (the church was a wide and highly mobile institution, with many important ecclesiastical and monastic leaders travelling to distant lands), missionary expeditions or even exiles. Thus, although distinct, ascetic or monastic travel and pilgrimage were included in the same consideration.

It is, for all of this, essential to retain that on the early medieval pilgrimage was not a uniform, regulated, or codified phenomenon. Just like in late antiquity, there was no set form of pilgrim dress, no established routes or rituals that defined a pilgrimage. The impact of this in reality was that, for example, reaching a particular destination was often less important than the journey itself. On the other hand, what was often considered pilgrimage – of which Egeria is a good example – was first of all monastic vocation, one that included travel at its very core. Pilgrimage thus consisted of a more free and flexible practice, therefore different from what it became in the following centuries.<sup>33</sup> A practice, no

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<sup>31</sup> A. B. Mariano and A. A. Nascimento ed., *Egéria – Viagem do Ocidente à Terra Santa no Séc. IV* [Egeria – Journey from the West to the Holy Land, in the fourth century] (Lisboa: Colibri, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, 27-35.

<sup>33</sup> Alfonso X (also known as *the Wise*), king of Castile and Leon (1252-1284), clearly stated in Title XXVII of the First *Partida* – the *Siete Partidas* (“Seven-Part Code”), or simply *Partidas*, was a Castilian statutory/normative code first compiled during the reign of Alfonso X, with the object of achieving legal uniformity for the Kingdom – not only what should be understood by pilgrims, but also the set of privileges and obligations that hung over them. The same monarch will partially return to this theme in Book VI of

doubt, associated to a special form of monastic spirituality derived from a quest for the ascetic qualities of the state of detachment. As Maribel underline:

Monasticism and pilgrimage had clearly diverged in their history: monasticism in the West, through the Cluniac reform movement, was now defined by stability, while pilgrimage became a form of religious travel practiced by the laity, focusing on a specific goal or quest. It also became increasingly standardized and regulated.<sup>34</sup>

Santiago of Compostela, in Northern Iberia, was one of the main centres that consecrated this new and definitive configuration of the pilgrimage. In fact, long-distance pilgrimage within Europe was developed by the tenth century, primarily in the form of travel to Santiago of Compostela.

The pilgrimage to Santiago of Compostela was closely associated with the *Reconquista* of the territories occupied by Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. The *Reconquista* was a holy war, and Santiago was its leader and religious patron. And as the eleventh century progressed, the powerful monastery of Cluny began to associate themselves even more actively with pilgrimage to Santiago – the monks did not perform pilgrimages themselves, but they built guesthouses and hospitals along the pilgrimage roads, that is, they provided the necessary infrastructures for the success of the new way of pilgrimage. In a next phase, the growing popularity of the new pilgrimage to Santiago of Compostela helped to inspire a new kind of traveller, primarily lay people, to journey to Rome and Jerusalem. But from now on, unlike the earlier travellers to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the pilgrims travelled in large groups, and were far different from

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*Fuero Real*, another normative text of his authorship. According to the doctrine expressed by Alfonso X, pilgrimage always has a religious dimension that translates directly or indirectly into the service of God and honour of the Saints, and implies, at least temporarily, a removal of the closest family members and their own property, often with great sacrifices and expenses, to demand certain sanctuaries, centers of pilgrimage. It should be noted that the pilgrimage centres themselves, of which Santiago of Compostela with its diocesan constitutions are an excellent example, established a whole set of rules to be followed in relation to the pilgrimage practice. J. Marques, “A assistência aos peregrinos no Norte de Portugal, na Idade Média” [Assistance to pilgrims in Northern Portugal, in the Middle Ages], *Revista de História* 11 (1991): 9-22.

<sup>34</sup> M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, 215. See also P. Zumthor, *La Medida Del Mundo* [The Measure of the World], 178-193.

the travelling monks who had visited the holy places and holy people in the early Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> The influence of the Spanish Reconquista in the first crusade as a mass and armed pilgrimage, a journey of conquest and purification, is clear.

In short, during the first Medieval centuries, monastic travel and pilgrimage walked together (geographically, a good example is given to us by the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, and the Holy Land). However, over the centuries and the spread and predominance of the *Regula Benedictina* (by the tenth century it became the most influential monastic rule in Western Christianity) and the Cluniac and Gregorian reform movements,<sup>36</sup> religious travel and monasticism ended up diverging completely.<sup>37</sup> With the creation of the pilgrimage centre of Santiago of Compostela we can say that became “official” the emergence of a new model of religious travel: goal-centred, long-distance pilgrimage aimed at the laity rather than at monks, which became an emblematic example of a life of stability (in a monastery), under a written rule and an abbot, emphasizing the isolation of the cenobium itself.

Monasticism and pilgrimage, as well as their protagonists, simply assumed different faces and directions. This, despite maintaining some itinerancy on the part of monasticism due, for example, to the transportation of books, to the temporal administration of monasteries,

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, 213-220.

<sup>36</sup> The Cluniac Reforms were a series of changes within medieval monasticism of the Western Church focused on restoring the traditional monastic life. The movement began within the Benedictine order at Cluny Abbey, founded in 910 by William I, Duke of Aquitaine (875-918). The reforms were largely carried out by Saint Odo (c.878 -942) and spread throughout France, into England, and through much of Italy and Christian Iberian Peninsula. Cluniac monks were strict observers of the Benedictine Rule. In its turn, the Gregorian Reformation had as its main driver Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085), although it started a few years earlier, under the pontificate of Pope Leo IX (1049-1054). It was a reaction to the then considered degeneration of the clergy, initiating a wide range of reforms that aimed to return the Church to the primitive times of Christ, the Apostles and their immediate successors. The main objectives of this reform were consolidated in the *Dictatus Papae*, published by Pope Gregory VII, in 1075. Gregorian reform was initiated by the ecclesiastics of Cluny Abbey.

<sup>37</sup> Both rules, *Regula Benedictina* and its predecessor *Regula Magistri*, condemn the practice of monastic wandering and so the early diversity of Western monasticism. Monastic practices, for example by Egeria and Paul Orosius (c.385-c.420), as well as other more or less contemporary travellers, were very different from the precepts established in the *Regula Benedictina*, so they simply could not continue to exist.

to the practice of visitation and to travels to the general chapters – which often involved long distance journeys, especially by the abbots.

It will be with the advent of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the thirteenth century, begging movements that emphasized travel and preaching and underestimated the importance of a permanent and stationary monastery, that this dominant attitude will be clearly challenged. It is the resurgence of a new and highly successful mobile monasticism, which, ironically, will permanently erase the memory of the diversity of primitive Western monastic practices, which had travel and exile at its centre. Displacements imbued with Christian spirituality that consisted essentially of visiting and commune with holy people (both living and dead), giving gifts, venerating relics, and setting up monastic foundations. In their freedom from the strictures of stable society, from Benedictine monasticism, and from formulaic pilgrimage, those travellers from the first half of medieval times, in the prosecution of the late Roman world, created their own form of spiritual expression through voyage, an asceticism of wandering unique. A life of movement also characterized by escape from hostility, escape from social pressures, escape from the mundane.

### **III. Medieval travel narratives**

Much of the travel that took place in the Middle Ages, especially in the early and late centuries, generated written testimonies, the so-called *Medieval travel books*, which as a whole comprise a multifaceted, interdisciplinary and composite genre.<sup>38</sup> They are works of diverse natures and have different aims. However, despite the variants – which could lead to different typologies, based, for example, on their intentions<sup>39</sup>; such as didactic texts, works with pragmatic aims (namely the guides), books presenting new information, among others – they all had an articulation of documentary and literary discourse, endowing them with a unique profile. The predominant documentary discourse

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<sup>38</sup> F. Cristóvão, “Introdução. Para uma teoria da Literatura de Viagens,” in *Condiciones Culturais da Literatura de Viagens – Estudos e Bibliografias* [Cultural Conditions of Travel Literature – Studies and Bibliographies], ed. Fernando Cristóvão (Coimbra: Almedina, 2002), 13-52.

<sup>39</sup> Without forgetting the ever-important processes of intertextuality. See Sofía Carrizo Rueda, *Poética del relato de viajes* [Poetics of the travel story] (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1997).

resulted in descriptions, mainly of the urban world, giving it a crucial importance, and the literary discourse dominated the narrative aspects.<sup>40</sup> As a result, medieval travel books offered a clear vision of contemporary reality, and how the world was perceived at that time.

At this point, it is crucial to highlight an issue that has worried researchers<sup>41</sup>: when travel represents only one or more episodes of the text, that is, when it does not constitute the totality of the narrative and does not work autonomously, as happens, for example in chronicles and biographies (in this case the hagiographies<sup>42</sup> deserve special emphasis), can we consider that same text valid as a travel account? We think so, as long as travel is nuclear in the episodes in question and they comply at least with the first of the narrative procedures proposed below. A good

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<sup>40</sup> See L. Albuquerque-García, “El ‘Relato de Viajes’: hitos y formas en la evolución del género,” *Revista de Literatura* 145 (2011): 15-34, idem, “Los ‘Libros de Viajes’ como género literario,” in *Diez estudios sobre literatura de viajes* [Ten studies on travel literature], ed. Manuel Lucena Giraldo y Juan Pimentel (Madrid: CSIC, 2006), 67-87.

<sup>41</sup> See M. Á. Pérez Priego, “Estudio literario de los libros de viajes medievales,” *Epos* 1 (1984): 217-239; R. B. Llavador, “Los libros de viajes medievales castellanos,” *Revista de Filología Románica* 1 (1991): 121-164.

<sup>42</sup> Hagiography is a type of biography that consists of describing the life of some saint, blessed and servants of God proclaimed by some Christian churches, especially by the Catholic Church, for their life and for the practice of heroic virtues. Christian hagiographies focus particularly on the miracles ascribed to these special men and women. So by extension it's an adulatory and idealized biography, that is, a special form of literature with its own conventions and specific models. This made historians consider for a long time a smaller and with little value source for their research work, especially because of their use of *topoi* and the overt attempts to mould facts. However, many today historians start to understand the conventions of hagiography, thus achieving using these texts to understand not only the life of a particular individual, but also the social milieu, social interactions, and relations evidenced in the texts (as it happens with medieval cavalry novels). By carefully peeling away the layers of *topoi*, and by exploring those areas where the text does not quite fit the conventions, one can begin to make use of hagiography, namely at the level of the study of specific areas such as travels, travellers and travel conditions, among many other topics. See the following examples: A. A. Nascimento ed., *Vida de São Teotónio* [Life of Saint Teotónio] (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 2013), Adamnán of Iona, *Adamnani Vita S. Columbae. Prophecies, Miracles and Visions of St. Columba (Columcille), First Abbot of Iona, A. D. 563-597* (London: Henry Frowde, 1895), M. Fontaine ed., *Sulpice Sévère, Vie de Saint Martin* [Severe Sulpice, Life of Saint Martin], 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967), M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Dublin: Blackrock, Co., 1996), S. Valério, *Vida de S. Frutuoso, Arcebispo de Braga* [Life of S. Frutuoso, Archbishop of Braga] (Braga: Oficina S. José, 1996).

example takes place with the Spanish text *El Victorial* or *Chronicle of Pero Niño*, by Gutierre Díaz de Games.<sup>43</sup>

From the great many adventures that were experienced, narratives emerged (independent or, as we said, inserted in other types of texts) that offered to an inquisitive Europe “a universe which until then was only known through fables.”<sup>44</sup> With the evolution of this process, literature turned the simple fact of attaining a destination into a spiritual act of great transcendence. The result was that medieval travel narratives acquired a very special status, regardless of whether they described real or imaginary dislocations.

In a broad sense, the medieval voyages of discovery, that is, long distance journeys, were concentrated in six main phases: in the transition from Antiquity to the Medieval period (spanning, therefore, several centuries) with the migrations of Germanic peoples that changed the western Mediterranean world,<sup>45</sup> the various missionary campaigns carried out, in particular, in central and northern Europe and the vacancies of

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<sup>43</sup> Gutierre Díaz de Games, *El Victorial*, ed. Rafael Beltrán Llavador, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> J. Baltrusaitis, *La Edad Media Fantástica, Antigüedades y exotismos en el arte gótico* [The Fantastic Middle Ages, Antiquities and Exoticisms in Gothic Art] (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994), 176.

<sup>45</sup> The barbarian invasions that marked the twilight of the Roman empire and the dawn of the medieval world resulted in wide movements of human communities, both in terms of escape and as the occupation and conquest of new territories: “As Rome slowly transformed itself after the economic and political crises of the third century, a new type of traveller emerged: the refugee. The degree of physical movement of people during this time was unprecedented, as was the impact these migrations would have on the Roman world. Beginning in the fourth century, a large number of Germanic people crossed the Roman frontier. The Germanic tribes were already known to the Roman Empire, but now were a new, threatening presence within its borders. The movements of the Germanic tribes ushered in a fundamentally new type of travel, brought on by hunger and the search for safety. This form of travel caused a chain reaction of displacement: as the Germanic tribes moved, invaded, and settled in areas of former Roman occupation, many inhabitants fled. The invasion of Italy by the Visigoths and the subsequent sack of the city of Rome in 410 spawned a wave of refugee migration to Africa and to the eastern provinces. Jerome, in his letter to Pacatula, notes the great number of Roman exiles throughout the Mediterranean. With the invasion of Spain in the fifth century, many more Romans fled to Africa by sea. In one of his sermons, Augustine writes of crowds of refugees in the city of Carthage. Orosius himself was one of these unfortunate travellers. The movement of refugees was not unidirectional: the sixth-century Vandal occupation of North Africa resulted in a wave of African refugees fleeing into Spain.” M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, 22.

pilgrims (pilgrimage here towards the dawn of mediocrity, as highlighted above, which include the practice of monastic wandering); between the seventh and ninth centuries, with the expansion of Islam; at the end of the High Middle Ages, when Scandinavians extended the horizons of Western Christianity to the East and Northeast; in the eleventh and twelfth centuries with the first Crusades; during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when merchants, missionaries and diplomats opened the Asian routes to China – the Orient was a truly oneiric horizon for the Medieval man of Western Christianity –; and finally, in the fifteenth century when European navigators undertook the exploration of the Atlantic Ocean that led to the periplus of Africa, the opening of new maritime routes to Asia and the discovery of America. Obviously, the nature, scope, and repercussion of each one of these phases was different.

Right away, in the transition from the Roman world to the Middle Ages, stand out travel experiences and the consequent writings (direct or indirect) of figures like Egeria, Martin of Tours, Baquiaro (?-c. 425), Fructuosus of Dumio or of Braga (?-665), John Cassian (c. 360-435); Paul Orosius; Martin of Dumio or of Braga (c. 510-c.579) and the so-called Piacenza Pilgrim in the second half of the sixth century,<sup>46</sup> among many others.

More than pilgrims, in the current sense, Egeria, Orosius and even Bachiaro were ascetic wanderers, practicing a form of monasticism based on itinerancy (monasticism itself was in a formative period when they travelled).<sup>47</sup> Above all, they were interested in visiting, meeting, and observing the lives of the holy men and women (ascetics and monastics), living at various holy sites.

Other travellers to mention in this period and advancing through the High Middle Ages are, for example, Helena Augusta, or Saint Helena (c. 246-c. 330), mother of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337)<sup>48</sup>; Saint

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<sup>46</sup> An anonymous Italian man known as the Piacenza Pilgrim, who undertook his Eastern journey in 570. See C. Milani ed., *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini: Un viaggio in Terra Santa del 560-570 d.C.* [Itinerarium Antonini Placentini: A journey to the Holy Land of 560-570 AD] (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1977).

<sup>47</sup> M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, passim.

<sup>48</sup> In 326-28 Helena undertook a journey to Palestine. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-339), who records the details of her pilgrimage to Palestine and other eastern provinces, she was responsible for the construction or beautification of two churches, the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, and the Church of Eleona on the Mount of

Melania the Elder (c. 350- c.417) and her granddaughter Saint Melania the Younger (c. 383-439), Jerome (c. 347-420)<sup>49</sup>; Peter the Iberian (c. 417- c. 491)<sup>50</sup>; Avitus of Braga and Hydatius (early fifth-century)<sup>51</sup>; Columba of Iona (521-597)<sup>52</sup>; Adamnán of Iona (c. 624-704), also known as Eunan; the Gallic bishop Arculf and Anglo-Saxon monk Willibald, each of whom journeyed to the Holy Land between 679 and 750 (their accounts are the best surviving testimonies of Western travellers visiting the newly Muslim-controlled East),<sup>53</sup>

Advancing into Medieval twilight, European expansion during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries opened ocean lanes that became the prime roads for proto-globalisation, that is, connecting human beings at a global scale. But this extensive process of opening up the world and the subsequent end of compartmentalized and isolated continents, undeniably had its first pioneering steps, its key starting point, with the opening of Christian Europe to the Orient in the immediately preceding centuries.

The dislocations and ensuing experiences of Medieval European travellers in the heart of Asia helped to alter geographic concepts and mental representations of the world, especially from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. As a result of their experience and

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Olives, sites of Christ's birth and ascension, respectively. Helena left Jerusalem and the eastern provinces in 327 to return to Rome.

<sup>49</sup> A monk who travelled extensively in the Mediterranean basin and who even has inhabited in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

<sup>50</sup> In the late fifth century Peter the Iberian (Peter was from Iberia in Asia Minor), an abbot of a monastery in Gaza, travelled around the Holy Land, where he met both Eudocia and Melania the Younger, also travellers to the Holy Land. An account of his life was written by one of his companions and followers, the monk John Rufus. See John Rufus, *Petrus der iberer* [Life of Peter the Iberian] (R. Raabe: Leipzig, 1885).

<sup>51</sup> Avitus of Braga and Hydatius were both from the Iberian Peninsula, and both took journeys, one to Jerusalem and the other to Rome. Avitus was a close friend of Paul Orosius.

<sup>52</sup> Adamnán of Iona, *Adamnani Vita S. Columbae*.

<sup>53</sup> Both left no written account of their travels by their own hand, however each told of his journeys to others who preserved them. Arculf related his story to the Irish abbot of Iona, Adamnán, who wrote it in his work *De locis sanctis*; and nearly a century later, the Anglo-Saxon Willibald, then bishop of Eichstätt, told of his to a nun of Heidenheim, Huneberc. As Maribel highlights, "these travelers' accounts reveal a remarkable continuity with the previous generation of travelers in terms of their monastic experience of the Holy Land." M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, 194.

testimony, both positive and negative, the legacy of Antiquity<sup>54</sup> underwent an irreversible transformation, the culmination of which took place in the aforementioned period of Discoveries.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, permanencies would continue to exist, as demonstrated by the countless texts written by Renaissance Humanists, namely Portuguese, such as *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (c. 1506) by Duarte Pacheco Pereira (1460-1533), or *Urbis Olisiponis Descriptio* (1554) by Damião de Góis (1502-1574). But nothing would ever be exactly the same again: the symbolic geography

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<sup>54</sup> To a large degree, the perception of distant spaces (and the intrinsic imaginary) during the Middle Ages originated in the Greco-Roman world of Classical antiquity. The Romans inherited the Greek traditions, and medieval doctors copied and adapted them to a new reality: Christianity. This is evident in the manuscripts of the great medieval authors, as well as in the general coeval view of the world. To cite just one example, in the *Etymologies* – a compendium of ancient, profane and religious knowledge – written by St. Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), the most widely read text after the Bible in the West during the High Middle Ages, the influence of Pliny the Elder (23-79) is as clear as it is determinant.

Let us look at the case of the notion of monster and monstrous. A monster is a manifestation of disorder and also, like all existing creatures, a manifestation of God – it appears by divine will. Leviathan's strength, for example, reveals the strength of God, its Lord. It is proof that God has dominion not only over the positive forces of life, but also the negative and destructive forces. To control them is, after all, a demonstration of the power and wisdom of God. This is the ambiguity that was always present in the Middle Ages, which came from Aristotle and was consolidated by St. Augustine and Isidore of Seville: within a natural order superior to the one we perceive, the monster is part of the divine plan and contributes to the composition of the universe as an element of diversity. The Middle Ages thus recognises the place of the monster in the norm of nature and spirit. This is evidenced by the massive transposition of the fabulous, the demonic and the wonderful – psychological elements of medieval daily life – to the walls and columns of cathedrals.

Regarding prodigious beings and revealing Pliny's clear influence – Pliny, of all the classical authors, was the most determinant in structuring medieval imagination regarding monsters –, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* performs a true synthesis on the notion of the monstrous. There are two main ideas to retain: monsters do not occur against nature, since they happen by divine will; and the Creator's will is the nature of all that is created. It follows that, instead, monsters occur contrary to *known nature*. The failure is therefore in man, who can only grasp part of nature, the part that he knows and through which he *assesses* monsters. See Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. III, book VIII (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1958-1962), Santo Agostinho, *A Cidade de Deus* [The City of God], vol. III, livro XXI, cap. VIII (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995), Isidoro de Sevilha, *Etimologías* [Etymologies], vol. II, ed. José Oroz Reta y Manuel A. Marcos Casquero (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1983).

<sup>55</sup> P. Chaunu, *La expansión europea (siglos XIII al XV)* [European expansion (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries)] (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1982).

of Christianity and the cosmography of the High Middle Ages had suffered a blow that it would never recover from.

The weight of Medieval authorities such as Cosmas Indicopleustes (seventh century), Beatus of Liebana (?-798), Isidore of Seville, Beda the Venerable (c. 673-735) or Aethiculster (seventh – eighth centuries) began to wane. Nor would their successors, such as Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080-1154), who gave continuity to many of the old cosmographic ideas, manage to resist the assault from the direct experience acquired (by travellers) in the Orient. It was the aforementioned transformation over a long time, measured in centuries.

The literary production associated with trade contacts with the Orient was copious. Obviously, the great protagonist was Marco Polo's book (1298–1299).<sup>56</sup> This collection of stories reflected, on the one hand, the explosion and subsequent predominance of urban life during this period, and on the other hand, the great importance of mercantile activity and maritime commerce as catalysts of multifaceted relations with the Asian world.

In the written accounts of merchants and missionaries alike, there is a European and Christian cultural identity, a civilizational reference that would be used as a means of comparison at a time when contacts were being established with the Oriental and religious *Others*. This model served as a basis for Western travellers to evaluate what they saw and experienced; especially, what they were unfamiliar with and what they found *strange*. Not being professional writers but rather deliverers of a certain way of seeing the world, and consequently invested with selective observation, the evidence that they conveyed was invaluable, even in terms of nature (and the physical world), the preferred backdrop for the human adventure.

Inevitably, the capacity of European travellers to distinguish between physical reality and symbolic representation, and consequently gain a more accurate idea of a territory, increased from the mid-twelfth century onwards. Their familiarity with the extra-European space was expanded and demonstrated by the ever more realistic cartography.

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<sup>56</sup> Marco Polo's book, which was largely the outcome of direct observation, became widely known in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and strongly influenced the imagination and projects of future explorers, especially Christopher Columbus (1436-1506).

The expeditions to the Orient opened trade routes and cultural interaction that resulted in better knowledge of the geography of Eastern Europe and Asia. By the mid-thirteenth century, the Christians of the West already had a fairly accurate idea of both short and long itineraries – although somewhat uncertainly, and always dependent on the people they encountered upon arrival.

The medieval expeditions to the Orient enlarged the known world, just as the voyages of Discovery would do in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They changed the perception of the world, enriching the cultural panorama in numerous ways, such as the human element and its associated customs, but also, the fauna, flora, and of course, geography.

The material and spiritual repercussions were felt at different levels: in the geographic domain, with the expansion of Medieval borders; in the economic sphere with the opening up of new supply routes and new markets; in the political plane with new opportunities to form alliances to confront the threat of Islam, although this would prove to be more of an illusion than a reality; in the cultural sphere with the establishment of unprecedented relations with other civilizations; in the technical domain with the exchange of instruments and experiments; and ultimately, on the mental plane with greater open-mindedness. And (all this) without forgetting the actual travelling, which benefitted from abundant learning through theory and practice, namely in terms of preparing for long distance dislocations – maritime and overland – and the conscious examination of the conditions and requirements for travelling.

Heirs, especially in terms of daring and determination, of the aforementioned journeys of the missionaries of the early Middle Ages,<sup>57</sup> these voyages onto the far East represented the first decisive step towards a European expansion that would culminate in the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity with the opening to planetary routes.

The distant and arduous missions of men like Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (c. 1182-1252), Guillaume of Rubrouck (c. 1220-c. 1293), Giovanni de' Marignolli (c. 1182-1252), Marco Polo (c. 1254-1324), Odorico da Pordenone (1286-1331) and Giovanni da Montecorvino (1247-1328),<sup>58</sup> not only proved – once again – that the Medieval world

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<sup>57</sup> See note 3.

<sup>58</sup> Considered the first apostle of China, this Italian missionary was the first archbishop of the Orient, having been inducted as the Archbishop of Peking (Khanbaliq) and

was familiar with long distance circulation and mobility,<sup>59</sup> but also made available to Western Europeans a body of information of unprecedented scale. This naturally led to a clash between innovation, and the knowledge derived from books; between contemporary experience and tradition.

The classical geographers situated the biggest wonders of the world, organic and inorganic, in the Orient. These were lands where all kinds of wonders abounded. The mythology of frontier, subordinate to the powerful centre-periphery logic, became one of the targets of European travellers' questioning: the further away we get from Christianity and the Mediterranean world, the bigger the lack of geographical accuracy and cases of *mirabilia* (marvels).<sup>60</sup> In other words, the further away we get

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Patriarch of All the Orient. He was, in fact, the only archbishop of Peking in the Middle Ages.

<sup>59</sup> In addition to the several examples already mentioned, note the wide journey of the Jew Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173), who, in the second half of the twelfth-century, goes to Jerusalem while Crusaders occupied the city, and visited the territories of the Seljuk Empire (Syria and Mesopotamia). Benjamin of Tudela was one of the most important Jewish travellers of the Middle Ages. From his long journey an account came to us – formed by Tudela's travel notes, but which is certainly not his own – titled in Hebrew *Séfer-Masa'ot* or Travel Book. Although the text is fragmentary and incomplete in relation to what the original work may have been, it offers us a unique travel itinerary from the Hebrew community and, on the other hand, provides a clear view of the conception of the coeval reality by a prominent member of the Iberian Jewish community. Tudela focuses his attention on three fundamental aspects: first, the socioeconomic, political and religious situation of the main coeval Hebrew communities; then, the structural lines of politics in and between the Christian and Islamic nations of the so-called world of Mediterranean influence; finally, the mercantile and artisan centers of both universes, as well as the main trade routes that unite them. The author evokes, in the context of the development of his journey, the main contemporary events, as well as the predominant religions and cults. It pays equal attention to the great contemporary political and cultural centers, never forgetting the built heritage and the economy – especially agriculture, industry and commerce. See Benjamin of Tudela, *The world of Benjamin of Tudela: a medieval Mediterranean travelogue*, ed. Sandra Benjamin (London: Madison/Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995).

See also the example of Margery Kempe (c.1373-after 1438), an English Christian mystic, known for writing through dictation *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a work considered by some as the earliest autobiography written in the English language. Her book chronicles her domestic tribulations, her extensive pilgrimages to holy sites in Europe and the Holy Land, as well as her mystical conversations with God. See Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> We consider, in this context, that Jacques Le Goff's definition of the term *mirabilia* is quite illustrative: "mirabilia are not limited to things that Man admires with his eyes (...),

from order and the safely familiar, the closer we get to the unknown, to disorder, chaos, and thus, the fabulous. Albeit very slowly, this mental attitude began to change – not so much in terms of actual logic, which continued to persist, to a degree, until our times, but rather regarding the nature of awe-provoking elements. Take the paradigmatic example of William of Rubruck, who in his *Itinerarium* (thirteenth century) wrote “I inquired about the monsters and monstrous men, which Isidore and Solinus talked about. They [the Mongols] told me that they never saw such things, and we greatly suspect that it may be true.”<sup>61</sup> Further on in his text, this traveller also mentions that “They stated as being true, which I do not believe, that beyond Cathay there is a province where a person of any age that enters it will remain the same age as when he arrived there.”<sup>62</sup>

The same occurred later with Christopher Columbus, again in relation to the mythology of the boundaries of the world. (In his work) Giovanni de’ Marignolli claims to have been in Ceylon, near the Earthly Paradise, and seen a footprint of Adam on a mountain, although at the same time he refutes the uninhabitability of that torrid area or the total depopulation of the antipodes.

Travellers combined accurate observations with inherited beliefs, as part of the imaginary that they had carried with them since birth. This interconnecting of perspectives in their travel accounts can be summarized in the following premise: although they contributed to the survival of ancient myths and legends, the narratives of medieval travellers extensively helped renovate geographic knowledge in an attempt to adapt to reality.<sup>63</sup> A good example is provided by Francesco Balducci Pegolotti (?-1347) with his *Pratica della Mercatura* (c. 1340),

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for it is a whole imaginary than can be ordered around that appeal to one sense, sight, and of a series of images and visual metaphors.” J. Le Goff, *O Imaginário Medieval* [The Medieval Imaginary], 46.

<sup>61</sup> W. Rubruck, “Itinerarium,” in *Crônicas de viagem: Franciscanos no extremo oriente antes de Marco Pólo (1245-1330)* [Travel chronicles: Franciscans in the far east before Marco Polo (1245-1330)] (Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS/EDUSF, 2005), 195.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 195-196.

<sup>63</sup> More negative, for example, was the influence of copyists, who imagined, without ever seeing, or those who in their uncertainty, added unheard of and unfounded facts to the copies of travel books that they produced. See the emblematic case of several manuscript reproductions – and even some printed ones – of the book of Marco Polo, in which textual passages that merely refer to the great wonders of the world have illustrations of monsters, to attract the reader’s attention.

which presents a detailed itinerary for Cathay and was intended to be a useful guide for merchants. Another description with pragmatic objectives, which has the somewhat paradoxical curiosity of being an account of imaginary travels, stems from the Iberian *Libro del Conosçimiento* (*Book of Knowledge*, early fifteenth century). Both a travel narrative and a geographic compendium in the didactic sense of the term, this work presents the space in a dual way: on the one hand, a space to travel in, marked by the names of successive places so as to induce a symbolic appropriation (as seen by the result of the use of discursive artifices such as “vine” (we came) and “llegamos” (we arrived), which make plausible the illusion of spatial movement); on the other hand, a space as a source of learning, which has its maximum exponent in the coats of arms of the main places visited and in the description of the correct roads to Cathay: “The right roads to Cathay are two, one by way of Constantinople, crossing the big sea (...) The other route is to enter the Mediterranean Sea and go to the island of Cyprus and on to the Greater Armenia and going ...”<sup>64</sup>

From his desk, this anonymous author *travels* through dozens of countries, describing of their geography, flags, inhabitants and customs, and legends. The result is a truly practical guide for travellers.

At this point, one fact is established: thanks to their experience on the road and the ensuing travel manuscripts, the image of the world changed. There was unquestionably a revision of the concept of the planet, because the question of relations between different peoples and races arose on an unprecedented scale in Western Medieval Christianity, that is, the issue of alterity and of interculturality. Consequently, to fully understand the attitude of Renaissance explorers in relation to the novelties they encountered, for example, in the New World, one must go back to the first signs of opening up, and to the geographical and ethnographical contacts that took place between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with Western Christianity’s incursions into Asia.

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<sup>64</sup> *Libro del conosçimiento de todos los reynos et tierras et señoríos que son por el mundo et de las señales et armas que han cada tierra et señorío por sy et de los reyes et señores que los proueen, escrito por un franciscano español a mediados del siglo XIV* [Book of the knowledge of all the kingdoms and lands and lordships that are around the world and of the signs and blazonry that each land and lordship has by itself and of the kings and lords who provide them, written by a Spanish Franciscan in the middle of the fourteenth century], ed. Marcos Jiménez de la Espada (Madrid: T. Fortanet, 1877, Ms. S, escudo LXXVIII), 123.

Those travellers, much less prepared in every way than their future counterparts, observed the religious practices, daily customs and moral behaviour of the inhabitants that they came in contact with. And, a fundamental fact was that, in most cases, their views were based on value judgements of what they had seen and heard, that is, on conditioned knowledge.

In the first phase, there is a more or less harmonious coalition between a literary legacy, whereby books were a civilizational cultural referential, and direct observation, whereas in a later phase, there was a noticeable conflict between both sides, with the predominance of personal explorations. In effect, these medieval travellers slowly began to rely more on experience, and always strove to be plausible, as demonstrated in their accounts by their reiterated concern with accuracy.

Even after closing (its doors) again to foreigners with the fall of the ruling Mongol dynasty in 1368, the Far East remained a living memory to Western Christianity and helped kindle the ambitions of European explorers in the fifteenth century. Consequently, reminiscences of the endeavours of the 1300s can be found in writings as diverse as those of Peter of Abano (1250-1315), Boccaccio (1313-1375), or even Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343-1400).

A series of events, such as the collapse of the Tartar Empire, the conversion to Islam of the Mongols of Turkestan and Iran, the bubonic plague and the Great Schism brought an end to the Christian missions in the mid-fourteenth century. Asia became closed again to Europeans. As a result, the accounts of renowned voyages began to fade in Western memory. Ancestral legends recovered lost ground in the contemporary mentality and less truthful narratives began to appear: around 1350, the supposed author John Mandeville wrote a travel memoir which combined an account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a book about the wonders of Asia; some years later an anonymous author wrote the *Libro del Conoscimento*. It is no coincidence that these texts were almost concurrent and were widely disseminated. A lack of first-hand information led to the publication of imaginary voyages that helped satiate readers' craving for new information, and which were soon assimilated into the familiar and accurate accounts of missionaries and merchants, operating thus a complex connection between real and imaginary facts, between actuality and tradition. For us today, these narratives appear different from each other, but at that time they were

not. The use of the *Libro del Conosçimiento* as a reference for real journeys is evidence of this fact.<sup>65</sup>

According to Paul Zumthor and María Jesús Lacarra, the authors and their audiences were not discriminating on credibility, a feature less important then, than it is today.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Jacques Le Goff states that “Medieval Western writers did not create hermetic compartments between scientific or didactic literature, and fiction. They included wonders to an equal degree in all these genres.”<sup>67</sup> The important point to retain is that readers of that period would read a work according to a plurality of perspectives, which, as Hans Robert Jauss points out, determined the conception of the actual works.<sup>68</sup>

The theory of this researcher is based on the central idea of a *horizon of expectations*, a concept that is defined by a set of cultural, ethical and literary expectations manifested by readers in the specific historical time in which the work emerges. Jauss defends that, apart from the traditionally accepted aesthetics of production and representation, there is another even more decisive one, at a deeper level, which is the basis of this production: an aesthetics of reception and influence. This aesthetics is founded on the previous literary experience of readers, and especially, on their horizon of expectations about a new work. This mental state predisposes and influences the author during the process of conception of a work.

In the case of texts like the *Libro del Conosçimiento*, where the use of the first person places it in the category of autobiographical models,

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<sup>65</sup> M. Jesús Lacarra, “La imaginación en los primeros libros de viajes,” in *Actas del III Congreso de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval* [Proceedings of the III Congress of the Hispanic Medieval Literature Association] (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), 501-509.

<sup>66</sup> P. Zumthor, *La Medida Del Mundo. Representación del espacio en la Edad Media* [The Measure of the World. Representation of space in the Middle Ages] (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994), 285-303, M. Jesús Lacarra, “El *Libro del Conosçimiento*: un viaje alrededor de un mapa,” in *Libro del conosçimiento de todos los rregnos et tierras et señorios que son por el mundo, et de las señales et armas que han* [Book of the knowledge of all the kingdoms and lands and lordships that are around the world, and of the signs and blazonry they have], ed. María Jesús Lacarra, María del Carmen Lacarra Ducay y Alberto Montaner (Zaragoza: Institución “Fernando El Católico” (CSIC) / Diputación de Zaragoza, 1999), 77-93.

<sup>67</sup> J. Le Goff quoted in D. Corbella Díaz, “Historiografía y Libros de viajes: *Le Canarien*,” *Revista de Filología Románica* 1 (1991): 104.

<sup>68</sup> H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Paris: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 3-45.

readers were led to make an association between the work and other similar productions, such as the travel reports of missionaries. This way, imagined texts gained authenticity and credibility – the unlikeliness of the itinerary of the *Libro del Conosçimiento*, for example, did not prevent it from being a reference for the conquerors of the Canaries, or even, as Peter Russell defends, possibly for the expeditions of Prince Henry (the Navigator) along the West African coast.<sup>69</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that in the countries of Christendom travel accounts benefited from a wide audience avid for information about the lands that existed beyond the familiar boundaries – this huge lack of news, is, in fact, one of the causes for the extensive dissemination and acceptance of this literary genre. The influence of these writings on readers was, therefore, considerable, because of the facts they mentioned and the importance they had in the collective mentality. It entailed, ultimately, a response to a need of that audience.

Hence, it is easy for us to understand that when applied to the Middle Ages, the distinction between “real” and “fictitious” is an ineffectual exercise. The travel accounts alternated observations derived from reality with descriptions of myths and local legends. Knowledge of a space did not preclude the fantastic or unreal elements, which were largely derived from Antiquity and from the Scriptures; they overlapped and complemented each other in a discursive totality without regard for the resulting contradictions.

Another argument that reveals the weak operativity of the division between real and fictitious narratives, as well as the simplistic character of these classifications, resides in the intense interaction between geographical and travel works. The same work could have “diverse” origins, some very different from each other.

In summary, the so-called “real” narratives were, in the Middle Ages, full of fantasies, while those classified as “fictitious” had many passages full of true information, the fruit of the author’s experience or acquired from someone who had travelled and recorded, or transmitted orally, their adventures.

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<sup>69</sup> P. Russell, “A Quest Too Far: Henry the Navigator and Prester John,” in *The Medieval Mind: Hispanic Studies in Honour of Alan Deyermond*, ed. Macpherson and R. Penny (London: Tamesis, 1997), 401-416, Idem, “The Infante Dom Henrique and the Libro del conocimiento del mundo,” in *In memoriam Ruben Andressen Leitão*, vol. II, ed. J. Sommer Ribeiro (Lisboa: INCM, 1981), 259-267.

## 1. *Narrative procedures*

Many individuals from all walks of medieval life left written evidence of their experience on the roads, giving rise to a vast literature: guides and reports of pilgrimages, accounts of missionaries and ambassadors, epistolography records, itineraries, merchants' guides, explorers' and adventurers' narratives, and even descriptions of imaginary journeys.<sup>70</sup>

Although diversified<sup>71</sup> and comprehensive, this genre involved a series of narrative procedures – not necessarily simultaneous –, which make medieval travel narratives an autonomous and coherent form of literature in the panorama of medieval narrative prose.<sup>72</sup> However elementary they may seem, these literary mechanisms help, in fact, to identify this type of accounts, and, consequently, contribute to the identitary legitimation of the greater whole of which, after all, they are an integral part.

### *A. Observing an itinerary*

The first and pivotal tenet was to respect an itinerary. These narratives were structured according to a main trajectory, which constituted the backbone of the story and is present from the beginning to the end.

Following a route, was, therefore, the structuring element, the essence of a medieval travel narrative, even in the form of a pilgrimage guide, a letter/report concerning an embassy, or an account written by missionaries.

### *B. Chronological order*

Chronological order is another particularity of travel narratives. Following an itinerary, the narrator was obliged to adopt a temporal sequence. It was not an absolute dependence on time, as was the case of chronicles and biographies. It was, rather, the use of an instrument whose objective was to contextualise, within a temporal framework, the roads

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<sup>70</sup> These borrowing from intertextuality.

<sup>71</sup> Diversified here may take on the meaning of hybrid, interdisciplinary, or even possessing a notable capacity to metamorphose, given the kaleidoscope of dimensions it covers.

<sup>72</sup> At this point, we follow closely the proposal of analysis of M. Á. Pérez Priego, “Estudio literario de los libros de viajes medievales,”

travelled, in other words, that function as an element that legitimizes the likelihood of the travelogue.

The more historically accurate a travel narrative was, the more objective chronological order was. On the other hand, the more fabulous a narrative was, the less accurate was the chronological order of the text, bringing us closer in this case to a novel.

### *C. Spatial order (the central role of cities)*

Albeit, the most important thing in Medieval travel books, that which created its real narrative order, was space, not time. Intimately associated to the itinerary, the spatial order materialized with the places that were passed through and described.

Having reached this point, we come across an essential fact: in the pursuit of a trajectory not everything had the same importance for the traveller, who was obliged to choose and select the fundamental milestones of the itinerary: the cities.

In Medieval travel narratives cities became an essential reference, through which the description of the itinerary developed. Consequently, urban centres were converted into the true narrative nuclei around which the rest of the story was organized, the description of the journey. When there were no cities in a given stage of the itinerary, there was a sudden speeding-up of the narration and the space covered. On the other hand, the presence of an important city slowed down the temporal rhythm and extended the narration.

This centrality of the urban world is a legacy of the ancient world, more specifically of the late Roman city, whose imaginary has passed to medieval times and is closely associated with the practice of travel: Rome, Jerusalem, and Constantinople are just three major examples.<sup>73</sup> The cities were, in essence, the civilizing points of connection that, through the system of Roman roads, structured the entire empire, both West and East.

Centres of power par excellence, cities were superior and vital spaces which were usually mentioned with an intense fervour. The *urban*

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<sup>73</sup> Alexandria, Antioch, Bethlehem, Braga, Chalcedon, Cologne, Corinth, Damascus, Sepphoris, Ephesus, Hebron, Hipona, León, Milan, Nazareth, Nicaea, Pergamon, Cana (of Galilee), Ravenna, Rhodes, Toledo, Tours, Sidon, Tyre, Bordeaux, Gades, Lisbon, Merida, among many others.

*conscience* that invaded Europe from the twelfth century onwards clearly determined how the authors thought, and the view of the world that was conveyed in their narratives.

Three basic foundations ensured that cities had a very specific place in the contemporary world view: isolation (in the sense of individuality and delimitation of what surrounded it), solidity (safety and protection from what came from the outside, embodied by its walls and “personal” army), and verticality (in the sense of magnitude and power).<sup>74</sup>

Cities were Order. Their centrality in relation to the region they were integrated in separated them from the rurality and wild exterior where disorder, violence, and chaos reigned. What lay beyond the walls was the antithesis of that which their inhabitants sought in the streets, squares, bell towers, and markets.

Furthermore, cities were always associated to learning, study and science. They were the space of knowledge, for it was there where the greatest centres of learning were located: the universities. In this whole picture, the influence of the rhetorical paradigm of the *laudibus urbium* in the descriptions of the cities that offer medieval travel books should be highlighted.

In essence, it is about the presence in these texts of the rhetorical procedure of *evidentia*, concretized in the *evidentia topographica* of the said *laudibus urbium*. Hence, the authors observe with particular attention in their urban descriptions topics such as antiquity and the founders of the place, the location and fortifications, the fertility of the surrounding fields, the quality and abundance of the waters, the customs of the inhabitants, the buildings and monuments, the famous men, the comparison with other known cities (in particular those of their nations of origin).<sup>75</sup>

#### *D. The presence of mirabilia*

The treatment of wonders or *mirabilia* are another defining element in medieval travel narratives. Travellers often interrupted their itineraries to describe the *mirabilia* that they came across, or that they heard about. They were fabulous narratives, intrinsically associated to the spaces travelled, and provoked great expectations in the readers. They depicted

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<sup>74</sup> P. Zumthor, *La Medida Del Mundo* [The Measure of The World], 108-137.

<sup>75</sup> R. B. Llavador, “Los libros de viajes medievales castellanos,”

the strange and unknown, but absolutely real because they had been seen and experienced by the authors/narrators, and marvellous, because they were related to what was not seen and observed daily. One example is that which was conveyed by the discovery of real marvels, found in the grandiosity of constructions such as the Basilica of Saint Sophia (*Hagia Sophia*), or the surviving structures of Ancient Rome. The contemplation of such creations – some human, others natural – caused great awe and admiration in the traveller, and later in the reader (good examples are provided by Ruy González de Clavijo's *Embajada a Tamorlán* [Embassy to Tamorlán] and Pero Tafur's *Andanças e viages por diversas partes del mundo avidos* [Journeys around different parts of the world]).

As we have already pointed out, using Jacques Le Goff's definition,<sup>76</sup> the word *mirabilia* refers to phenomena perceived by medieval man not so much with the senses, but more with the "soul." It is, in effect, an inner look, that is, to apprehend something with the "eyes of the spirit", therefore with the imagination. The very etymology of the word elucidates us about its semantics and the way it distances itself from the current meaning: *mirabilia* comes from the root *mirror*,<sup>77</sup> which means (transitive) astonished at, marvel at, admire, amazed at, wonder at; and *miror*, in its turn, comes from latin *mirus* (wonderful, marvellous, amazing, surprising, fantastic). Thus, the *mirabilia* were something concrete, endowed with materiality, for medieval man. It was not a chimera, as it is for us today, instead it was part of "the possible." Hence, Le Goff proclaim that "In what corresponds to our 'wonderful,' and where we see a category – category of spirit or literature –, the clergy of the Middle Ages (and those who received information and training from them) saw a universe without a doubt, which it is very important, but a universe of objects: more of a collection than a category."<sup>78</sup>

The way of medieval man to know and represent the world was the result of a determined cultural, symbolic and religious construction. It was a system that worked from a prefigured model and that implied a pre-established initial relationship. It was an entire knowledge prepared and offered beforehand, which served to decode the profound meanings of existence. After all, the main activity of medieval man focused

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<sup>76</sup> See note 59.

<sup>77</sup> Where does the word come from, in English, "mirror."

<sup>78</sup> J. Le Goff, *O Imaginário Medieval* [The Medieval Imaginary], 46.

precisely on deciphering the divine message. It was what gave meaning to his existence, which was organized according to a codified conduct.

For this reason, the traveller, especially the clergyman and the merchant, confronted the reality discovered at every moment with that represented in the models and cultural patterns he inherited. The issue is that, sometimes, the previously integrated does not match with personal experience (the seen and heard by itself) or even with that transmitted by third parties. In these cases, a conflict is generated, since the divergent circumstance requires, on the one hand, a process of deconstruction of the already known, and, on the other hand, in parallel, the codification of an unprecedented reality with the consequent creation of a new and original knowledge. This is the right moment for the appearance of *wonder*, because it encompasses everything that is different and with an amazing character, to cause astonishment. Now, this conflict is new and guarantees travel books the merit of breaking with tradition, thus legitimizing their autonomy as a genre.<sup>79</sup> Because they are heterogeneous in nature and content, the books of the supposed John Mandeville,<sup>80</sup> Marco Polo,<sup>81</sup> Jordan Catala of Sévérac (c. 1280-c. 1330),<sup>82</sup> Odorico da Pordenone,<sup>83</sup> William of Rubruck,<sup>84</sup> and Niccolò da Conti (1385-1469)<sup>85</sup> constitute perhaps the best examples of this phenomenon.

The category of “strange” is, in short, the difference that characterizes the unknown lands and causes attraction for them. And this difference

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<sup>79</sup> E. Popeanga Chelaru, “Lectura e investigación de los libros de viajes medievales,” *Revista de Filología Románica* 1 (1991): 9-26, M. S. Mazzi, *Los Viajeros Medievales* [Medieval Travellers] (Madrid: Antonio Machado Libros, 2018), 203-220.

<sup>80</sup> Jean de Mandeville, *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* [The Book of Wonders of the World], ed. Christiane Deluz (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> Marco Polo, *The book of Marco Polo, the Venetian, concerning the kingdoms and marvels of the east*, 2 vols., ed. Henri Codier, Amy Frances Yule, Henry Yule (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1975).

<sup>82</sup> Jordan Catala de Sévérac, *Une image de l'orient au XIV<sup>e</sup>ème siècle: les Mirabilia descripta de Jordan Catala de Sévérac* [An image of the Orient in the fourteenth century: the *Mirabilia descripta* by Jordan Catala de Sévérac], ed. Christine Gadrat (Paris: École des Chartes, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Odorico da Pordenone, *Relación de viaje* [Travel Book], ed. Nilda Guglielmi (Buenos Aires: Bibloscop., 1987).

<sup>84</sup> William of Rubruck, *The mission of Friar William of Rubruck: his journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253-1255*, ed. Peter Jackson and David Morgan (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Nicolò de Conti, *Le voyage aux Indes* [The journey to India], ed. Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary, Geneviève Bouchon (Paris: Chandeigne, 2004).

is precisely what causes the “wonder.” Medieval imagination, tired of routine and everyday triviality, needs to exalt the strange and the difference (hence, for example, the great acceptance and impact of legends such as those of Alexander the Great and, above all, Prester John). It feeds on this novelty. And because they reveal to the reader these distant places full of extraordinary and amazing, travel books are the perfect way to achieve this – it is not, by chance, that these legends are present in several of these narratives, in particular those imaginary that good examples are *Libro del conocimiento*, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* and the *Libro del infante don Pedro de Portugal* [Infante Don Pedro's from Portugal book], authored by Gómez de Santisteban (who, very importantly, refers to the real travels made by the protagonist)<sup>86</sup>.

Northern Europe, Africa, Asia, and the oceans were the places of marvels and of divergent (this is where monsters and monstrous races inhabited, for example)<sup>87</sup>. The place where anything was possible, but to get there it was necessary to travel. In that respect, wonder, space and travel must walk hand in hand. The traveller was in search of differences, not similarities. He recorded the extraordinary, that which amazed him in the *Other*, which he found so far away. And he usually did it by comparing it with what he was familiar with, that is, using his own cultural and civilizational patterns as reference.

A final revealing aspect of the importance of “wonders” in this type of text is the fact that it sometimes appears in the title itself, as with the narratives of the aforementioned Marco Polo, Jordan Catala de Sévérac and “John Mandeville.”

### *E. Absence of a clear separation between geography, history, legend, and myth*

In these narratives, there was no clear separation between geography, history, legend, and myth. Here, contrary to the *Imago Mundi*, that clearly present these topics as independent areas, the reference to a specific

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<sup>86</sup> Gómez de Santisteban, *Libro del infante don Pedro de Portugal* [Infante Don Pedro's from Portugal book], ed. Francis M. Rogers (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1962).

<sup>87</sup> India, for example, because absolutely strange, was configured as the territory par excellence of wonders. See Jacques Le Goff, “O Ocidente medieval e o oceano Índico: um horizonte onírico”, in *Para um Novo Conceito de Idade Média – Tempo, Trabalho e Cultura no Ocidente* [Towards a New Concept of the Middle Ages – Time, Work and Culture in the West] (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1993), 263-280.

space could be used to evoke a political event, designate its fantastic inhabitants or recall a hero associated to its founding. Legend and History, fable and reality walked side by side, especially in fictitious travel narratives – texts whose fundamental purpose was to produce an overview of geographic knowledge at a given moment, in which the reading of the *auctoritas*,<sup>88</sup> the study of maps and the use of oral legends and testimony of contemporary travellers, substitute in large part the real events experienced by the actual author.

At this point, we again call attention to the influence of the rhetorical paradigm of *laudibus urbiium* in the descriptions of cities that characterize a large part of Medieval travel books (for example, the Iberian ones), and where preferential aspects to be observed by the authors are the antiquity and the founders of the place, the location and the fortifications, the fertility of the surrounding fields, the quality and abundance of the waters, the customs of the inhabitants, the buildings and monuments, the famous men.<sup>89</sup> In the descriptive development of all these elements, the aforementioned absence of a clear separation between geography, history, legend and myth predominates.

The texts that exemplify this narrative procedure are very varied. Right away, the already named narrative of Egeria (fourth century). Modelling at the level of travel practice in the transition from the ancient world to medieval times, this text is paradigmatic in relation to the absence of a clear separation between geography, history, legend, and myth. For the same period and for the High Middle Ages, pilgrimage guides and accounts should also be mentioned, namely the primitive *itineraria* and descriptions of the Holy Land. Then, for the High Middle Ages and despite its very specific nature, the *Christian Topography* of Cosma Indicopleusta (c. 550).<sup>90</sup>

In the framework of the Late Middle Ages, a whole set of important narratives stands out, namely, the *Historia Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus* of Giovanni di Pian di Carpine (1240s)<sup>91</sup>; the *Itinerarium fratris*

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<sup>88</sup> Classical and Medieval authors considered the supreme authorities in certain matters. Main examples are Herodotus, Saint Isidore of Seville and Saint Augustine.

<sup>89</sup> See subpoint (c).

<sup>90</sup> Cosma Indicopleusta, *Topografia Cristiana* [Christian Topography], ed. Antonio Garzya (Napoli: M. Dauria Editore, 1992).

<sup>91</sup> Jean du Plan Carpin, *Histoire des Mongols* [History of the Mongols], ed. Jean Becquet et Louis Hambis (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1965).

*Willielmi de Rubruquis de ordine fratrum Minorum, Galli, Anno gratia 1253 ad partes Orientales* of William of Rubruck (c.1255)<sup>92</sup>; *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* of Burchard of Mount Sion (1283)<sup>93</sup>; *Liber Peregrinacionis* or *Itinerarius* of Ricoldo di Montecroce (1288-1291)<sup>94</sup>; *Il Milione* (*Livre des Merveilles du Monde* or *Devisement du Monde*) of Marco Polo (1298-1299)<sup>95</sup>; *Letters from Khanbalik* of Giovanni da Montecorvino (1305-1306)<sup>96</sup>; *De modo saracenos extirpendi* of Guillaume Adam (1316-1318)<sup>97</sup>; *Letter to the guardian of Perusa from Chaitón* of André of Perusa (1326)<sup>98</sup>; *Itinerarium Terrarum* of Odorico da Pordenone (1330)<sup>99</sup>; *Directorium ad passagium faciendum* of Guillaume Adam (1332)<sup>100</sup>; *Mirabilia descripta* of Jordan of Severac (1329-1338)<sup>101</sup>; *Letter from Almalik* of Pascual de Vitoria (1338)<sup>102</sup>; (*Le digressioni sull'Oriente nel Chronicon Bohemorum* of Giovanni de' Marignolli (1355-1359)<sup>103</sup>; *Embajada a Tamorlán* [Embassy to Tamorlán] of González de Clavijo (early fifteenth century)<sup>104</sup>; *Le voyage aux Indes* [The journey to India] of Niccolò da Conti (1444)<sup>105</sup>; *Andanças e viajes por diversas partes del mundo avidos* [Journeys around different parts of the world] of Pero Tafur (1453-1454)<sup>106</sup>; *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam* of Bernhard of Breidenbach (1486).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See note 83.

<sup>93</sup> Burchard of Mount Sion, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* [Description of the Holy Land], ed. John R. Bartlett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>94</sup> Ricoldo de Montecroce, *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor* [Book of Travels], ed. J. C. M. Laurent (J. C. Hinrichs Bibliopolis: Lipsae, 1873).

<sup>95</sup> See note 80.

<sup>96</sup> Henry Yule ed., *Cathay and the way thither*, vol. III (London: Hakluyt Society, 1913-16).

<sup>97</sup> Guillaume Adam, *De modo saracenos extirpendi* [Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906].

<sup>98</sup> Henry Yule ed., *Cathay and the way thither*.

<sup>99</sup> See note 82.

<sup>100</sup> Guilherme Adam, "Directorium ad faciendum passagium transmarinum," *American Historical Review* XII-4 (1907): 810-857, XIII-1 (1907): 66-115.

<sup>101</sup> See note 81.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Yule ed., *Cathay and the way thither*.

<sup>103</sup> Johannis de Marignola, *Chronicon*, ed. Josef Emler (Praha: s.n., 1882).

<sup>104</sup> Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán* [Embassy to Tamorlán], ed. Francisco López Estrada (Madrid: Castalia, 2005).

<sup>105</sup> See note 85.

<sup>106</sup> Pero Tafur, *Andanças e viajes por diversas partes del mundo avidos* [Journeys around different parts of the world], ed. Marcos Jiménez de la Espada (Madrid: Miraguano/Polifemo, 1995).

<sup>107</sup> Isolde Mozer Hrsg., *Bernhard von Breydenbach: Peregrinatio in terram sanctam. Eine Pilgerreise ins Heilige Land. Frühneuhochdeutscher Text und Übersetzung* [Bernhard von Breydenbach: *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam. A pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Early modern high German text and translation*] (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

Regarding the universe of imaginary travel accounts, we refer in particular to the aforementioned *Libro del conocimiento*<sup>108</sup> and *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*.<sup>109</sup> We give special emphasis to the latter as it makes use of others (real) travel texts known at the time, articulating them in a coherent whole, and also due to the dissemination and consequent success that it experienced.

An account of an imaginary journey, *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* [The Book of Wonders of the World] was originally written in French, around 1357. The popularity throughout Europe of this work attributed to John Mandeville represents an extraordinary phenomenon. This is confirmed by the almost three hundred manuscripts that still exist today. From beautifully illustrated codices to modest copies, this text was unrivalled in its dissemination and acceptance in the context of medieval books related to travel.

Probably the main cause for such success lies in the fact that the text reached a very diverse audience: while satisfying the curiosity of those who wanted to know the most recent wonders discovered in the East, it provided important data to those eager for geographic knowledge.

After having travelled the paths of the world for thirty-five years, the author / traveller returns to his native land, England, then deciding to put in writing the memories of his adventure. The result is an account that provides an image of the world that we can consider representative of European cultured men of the fourteenth century, before the discovery of Ptolemy's work. This, in addition to being an excellent portrait of the variety of tastes and knowledge of the European man of the Middle Ages. Although the author's final objective is to show the prodigies of God – the work, a remarkable compilation of monstrous beings, was conceived as if it were a popular encyclopaedia, being therefore written in a simple and accessible style that would allow to easily disclose the wonders to report –, *The Book of Wonders of the World* is also an important geographical treatise. Indeed, in his text, Mandeville illustrates how contemporary astronomers applied mathematical reasoning to the land and the firmament, showing that the geographic knowledge of his time was not as fantasy and archaic as we now believe.

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<sup>108</sup> See note 63. See P. C. Lopes, *Viajar na Idade Média. A visão ibérica do mundo no Livro do Conhecimento* [Travel in the Middle Ages. The Iberian view of the world in the Book of Knowledge] (Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 2005).

<sup>109</sup> See note 80.

On the other hand, the idea of the sphericity of the earth is widespread throughout the work.

The text reflects well the intellectual formation of the author and the works he used. In fact, the diversity of sources he used and articulated made it unequivocal that he consulted an ecclesiastical library. Particularly noteworthy are the author's various attempts throughout the text to make one believe the veracity of the journey.

Also, worth mentioning are the Muslim travel texts, the *rihla*, which we will delve into in the next section using four model texts, including for the topic here in discussion.

#### *F. To inform about the world*

To inform about a specific reality, the world as perceived through the eyes of the traveller, was the guiding principle of travel narratives. The important thing was the information that was transmitted. But these accounts were also an initiation to the enigmas that the world concealed within its frontiers (stands out here the didactic feature of these texts, which guarantees them a discursive singularity). Consequently, the journey emerged as a quintessential mechanism to reflect about Creation, time, space, diversity, and unity. And it went even further, as it became a prime vehicle to gain access to knowledge. Ultimately, to wander the world was synonymous with coming across its mysteries, its questions, its past, and its future.

In terms of the imaginary, we can claim that Medieval travel narratives reverted to the spirit of Antiquity, where travelling meant seeing the wonders of the world.

From another perspective, taking to the roads meant breaking with daily monotony as well as with familiar environments. It represented an escape from the known world. In this context, the imaginary became as vital for the existence of the traveller as the immediate experience of reality. And the further away from the ordering centre that the traveller was familiar with, the bigger were the driving forces to escape the monotony of reality. That is why the periphery of the world was so seductive. Ultimately, it was in faraway, isolated, and different places that *mirabilia* were exposed to the eyes of the medieval Christian.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See Jacques Le Goff, "O Ocidente medieval e o oceano Índico: um horizonte onírico."

Good examples are provided to us, once again, by the narrative of Egeria (fourth century); by Almerich's work *The 'fazienda' of overseas* (twelfth century)<sup>111</sup>; and by four major examples of the *rihla*, namely, *Across the East* of Ibn Yubayr<sup>112</sup>; *Travel Account* of Abu Hamid al-Gharnati<sup>113</sup>; *Travel in the Volga Bulgarian Nation* of Ahmad Ibn Fadlan<sup>114</sup>; and *Gift on the Curiosities of Cities and the Wonders of Travels* of Muhammad Ibn Battuta.<sup>115</sup>

As a general rule, the journeys practised by Muslims constitute, in form, intention, and content, an extension of the journeys of Antiquity. Indeed, Islamic travellers developed their itineraries under the same purpose as travellers from ancient Greece: to collect teachings about the world, to reflect on knowledge, to seek the wonders of Creation. That is why they developed a large part of their routes in the regions bordering the Mohammedan territory: Europe, Central and East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The routes that cut through the Medieval Muslim world are frequented by many travellers: merchants, officials, individuals willing to educate themselves, long-distance sailors, among several other categories of practitioners of the paths. Naturally, the pilgrimage to Mecca is the main motivation for travelling. However, it is far from being the only one. And, many times, the journey that had the sole purpose of reaching the sacred city and returning becomes an adventurous voyage through the surrounding spaces.

A large number of these travellers left testimony of their experiences around the known world. These are the *rihla*, travel accounts in Arabic, a literary genre of great importance in Muslim civilization, in many cases inseparable from the texts of geographers and historians. Arising from the twelfth century, the *rihla* have in their genesis the pilgrimages of

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<sup>111</sup> Almerich, *La fazienda de ultra mar* [The 'fazienda' of overseas], ed. Moshe Lazar (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1965).

<sup>112</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. William Wright (Leiden: David Brown Book Co., 1973).

<sup>113</sup> Abu Hâmîd al-Gharnâtî, *Abu Hamid el Granadino y su relación de viaje por tierras eurasiáticas* [Abu Hamid the Grenadian and his travel report through Eurasian lands], ed. César E. Dubler (Madrid: Maestre, 1953).

<sup>114</sup> Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, *Mission to the Volga*, ed. James E. Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

<sup>115</sup> Muhammad Ibn Battuta, *The travels of Ibn Battûta*, ed. Hamilton Gibb (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1994).

Muslim scholars to the holy places of Islam. Attracted by the search for knowledge, they travelled long distances with the aim of attending the erudite centers of the great metropolises of the Islamic East: Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo. As they completed the journeys, they wrote down their travel impressions day by day, and sometimes even hourly, gradually building up a kind of travel diary in which they echoed the surprises, wonders and difficulties they encountered along the way.

The main objective of the *rihla* was to inform, harmoniously combining the wonderful and the fantastic with factual observations and elements of reality, usually quite relevant and objective. The sensitivity to the marvellous, the concern of objectivity in relation to the real and the ability to filter what is really important in what is directly observable are, in fact, a defining characteristic of this Muslim literature. Everything suggests that the *rihla* genus was inaugurated by Sevillian Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi (1076-1148). However, his work was lost. In this context, due to its importance and the model it created, the text of Valencian Ibn Yubayr became formally considered the founder of the genre (he was plagiarized numerous times in the following centuries, including by the famous Ibn Battuta<sup>116</sup>).

Several of these Muslim travel narratives are from an anonymous source (much of which will be integrated into the monumental work *The One Thousand and One Nights*). The *rihla* were particularly cultivated in the Muslim West, mainly in the Iberian Peninsula and in Morocco. Exponents are the testimonies of Ibn Djubayr, Ibn Battuta and Abu Hamid.

### *G. The use of alterity and of the processes of identitary construction*

As a general rule, when travellers recorded their first contact with a human landscape (one that they had never seen before, or had heard about but had not “experienced”), the exercise of alterity took place

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<sup>116</sup> Here, it should be noted that, among Medieval authors, and especially among Muslims, there was a custom of copying, when not plagiarizing, more or less extensive parts of the works of their predecessors without, in most cases, mentioning them. These were model works, so the idea was that they could be used freely. In semantic terms, it was, therefore, a notion quite different from the current one. See Felipe Maíllo Salgado, “Introducción”, in Ibn Yubayr, *A través del Oriente: el siglo XII ante los ojos, Rihla* [Across the East: the twelfth century before our eyes, Rihla], ed. Felipe Maíllo Salgado (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1988), 17-35.

through different channels<sup>117</sup> and could assume different meanings. This also led to potential identitary constructions, both on the part of the traveller/narrator, and the *Other*, the one that was different – as well as, in a later stage, of possible processes of interculturality. From Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages and in the most diverse formats (guides, itineraries, accounts, and reports from embassies, epistles, among others), there are countless narratives that contain characteristic moments of this topic. The narratives of Marco Polo, Ruy González de Clavijo, Ricoldo di Montecroce, Giovanni di Pian di Carpine, William of Rubruck, Giovanni da Montecorvino, Odorico da Pordenone, Pascual de Vitoria, Niccolò da Conti, Bernhard of Breidenbach, as well as Ibn Fadlan's impressive *rihla* are superior examples of how much this topic marks the texts of Medieval journeys, in particular those relating to the Late Middle Ages and very especially those involving travel to the east, territory par excellence of contact with the *Other*.

#### *H. Forms of presentation of the accounts*

In terms of the presentation of the accounts, Medieval travel texts have a unique characteristic that differentiates them from most of the other forms of contemporary narratives, namely, the absence of parallel or interwoven actions that obliged the narrator to interrupt or leave the story in suspense (its narrative core was to follow an itinerary). Instead, they were distinguished by a linear and continuous narration, with a main character – individual or collective, real or fictitious –, almost always the narrator of the story. It should be noted, at this point, that this identity between protagonist and narrator established the “Self” of the travellers, expressed in the continuous use of the first person singular, as a privileged form of presentation of the account – a premise that resulted largely from the absence of parallel action, which in turn ensued from the fact that the development of these narratives involved following an itinerary.

We are, therefore, facing the predominance (not exclusive, it has to be highlighted<sup>118</sup>) of the “Self” of travellers in the discursive development

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<sup>117</sup> That is, clothing, funerary practices, food, customs, physical traits, and other cultural features that were agents of differentiation, and consequently, of evaluating eyes.

<sup>118</sup> When, by its nature, the account comes close, for example, to the chronicle or official historiography, sometimes the use of the third person takes place. A good example is provided by the *Embajada a Tamorlán* [Embassy to Tamorlán] of González de Clavijo,

of the text. Good examples lie in *Journeys around different parts of the world* of Pero Tafur and also, almost axiomatically, in the *Libro del conocimiento*. The *Libro del infante don Pedro de Portugal* [Infante Don Pedro's from Portugal book], on the other hand, almost always uses the plural first person, because the narrator, Gómez de Santisteban, who is one of the elements of the expedition in question, intends to present the journey as a collective experience, even though his attention is concentrated especially on individual figure of the Portuguese Infant, who is the true protagonist of history.

This technique helped make the narrative more appealing to the reader, to whom it transferred more easily real or imagined experiences without the interference of a narrator. But especially, it had a substantiating function, reinforcing the credibility and authenticity of a narration.

However, despite the almost constant use of the first person singular, Medieval travel books show a preference for external information, not the personal universe of the traveller – a situation which will only be verified with the arrival of Modernism. The protagonist was, above all, someone who observed and assessed; the biggest incursion into the domain of the personal was, for example, when the narrator evoked the reasons that led him to remain for a given time in a certain place.

Still, regarding the form of presentation of the account, it should be noted that the authors of travel books often combined small legendary or historical texts. Traditionally related with important figures or events in the contemporary collective memory, and to some extent associated with the itinerary to be followed, that is, the spatial order of the narrative in which they were inserted, these narratives (in other words, intertwining stories) operated the global articulation of the literary and documentary components of the work.

## 2. Audiences

In the late fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth century, the intended audiences of travel books belonged mostly to chivalric and

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which has a diplomatic mission as its backdrop and features a collective protagonist (the ambassadors of King Henry III of Castile), which in itself facilitates the use of the third person. The very historicity of this specific text renders any complementary device of verisimilitude and credibility unnecessary.

aristocratic circles. The reason was that these works reflected the mentality and chivalric life of European society in the 1400s more than clerical and scholarly ideology or mercantile activity. Notably, the audiences for these books were increasing, and were socially diverse. Ultimately, the authors wrote for different reasons: to satisfy people's curiosity, to cause awe, inform, instruct, glorify God, extol (for secular reasons) the kingdoms where they came from, disseminate knowledge, construct geographical and ethnical depictions, and very importantly, for the enjoyment of readers (in this aspect, the late Medieval travel texts precede Illuminism).

Also, fundamental is the fact that travel books strove to be thrilling. So apart from being informative, they also had a pragmatic function: to fill a void and break routines, transporting readers to the space and time of the text.<sup>119</sup> Readers not only read the work, they interiorized it, appropriating the references provided by the author. This is especially true for the pilgrimage accounts (whose superior model is provided by those who focus on the journey to the Holy Land). Indeed, its reading is not only informative, but also pragmatic, of integration of the individual's inner journey. Because each story is unique and because the pilgrimage is a journey that requires inner self-recognition. It is a deeply personal process. For this reason, too, reading the pilgrimage texts imposes itself as eschatological and pious.<sup>120</sup> Pilgrimage has a (spiritual) scope that other journeys do not, because it represents the time of salvation in space and is an image of the life of man on earth. The High Middle Ages met pilgrims who refused any other position in the world, enlightened nomads whose quest sought to reproduce the example of Jesus, such as the wandering monks of the early medieval times and the Irish monks in the sixth century.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Pedro Manuel Cátedra García, "La dimensión interior en la lectura de los libros de viajes medievales," in *Actas del primer congreso anglo-hispano* [Proceedings of the first Anglo-Hispanic Congress], vol. II, ed. Alan Deyermond and Ralph Penny (Madrid: Castalia, 1993), 41-58.

<sup>120</sup> Jeannine Guérin Dalle Mese, "Io o lui? (Il problema del narratore in alcune relazioni di viaggio del Trecento-Quattrocento)," in *La letteratura di viaggio dal Medioevo al Rinascimento. Generi e problemi* [Travel literature from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Genres and problems] (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1989), 7-17.

<sup>121</sup> J. Rubio Tovar, "Viajes, mapas y literatura en la España Medieval," in *Libros de viaje: actas de las Jornadas sobre los Libros de Viaje en el Mundo Románico, celebradas en Murcia del 27 al 30 de noviembre de 1995* [Travel books: Proceedings of the Conference on Travel Books in

Furthermore, the work merited being read or listened to because of the marvellous and curious things described therein – places, things and people.

### 3. *The repercussions of medieval travel books*

Medieval travel books influenced decisively the civilizations that saw them emerge. Their most notable achievement was to help definitively broaden the horizons of knowledge of that period. The fascination for the new and unknown that they transmitted (thus of the mysteries of the world), as well as the traveller's actual experience, were a permanent appeal to the curiosity and incentive for new endeavours that would culminate in the geographical discoveries of the Late Middle Ages, the last great travel adventure of medieval man.

From another perspective, with the exception of pilgrimage narratives, apart from supplying the West with invaluable and often first-hand information about distant lands and people, and about different subjects such as history, geography, and economics, this literature had the benefit of portraying a group of works that became emancipated from the spiritual constraints and the traditional limitations of learning and experience that were typical of written works from the earlier Middle Ages. Texts in which, comparatively, a more traditionalist and closed perspective of the world prevailed. There is an unmistakable encroachment on the limits (previously) imposed by the *autoritas*, which gained momentum over the centuries. The physical obstacles that had prevented access to the *Other's* space, distant and different, were now conquered. From the outset, these *realizations* ensured that travel narratives – which revealed a different objective in each case – had a well-demarcated place in the context of the culture in which they were inserted.

At each step in their trajectory travellers wanted to identify the cultural categories of the medieval encyclopaedia. However, their inquisitiveness increased more and more. Apart from attempting to recognize in nature what they had previously learned, the traveller (especially in the Late Middle Ages) wanted to learn more about the new space that he is experiencing. This opportunity led him to progressively

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the Romanic World, held in Murcia from 27 to 30 November 1995], ed. Fernando Carmona Fernández (Murcia: EDITUM, 1996), 321-343.

start comparing the knowledge acquired formerly with the knowledge gained *in situ*, whereby a mental transformation occurred in which the real place, inevitably different from the imagined, tended to gain ground over the aprioristic geography.<sup>122</sup> William of Rubruck was the first to refute the existence of the marvels sanctioned by Isidore of Seville. Next, Giovanni de'Marignolli claimed that during his journey to the land of the three Indias he did not encounter any proof of the existence of extraordinary beings. Other examples of the evolution in the connection between what was learned and what was directly observed and experienced, that is, between the past and the present, were the cataloguing, reflective and organizing perceptions of travellers like Marco Polo, Pero Tafur (c. 1410-c. 1484), and González de Clavijo (?-1412).

This resulted in a didactic attitude in relation to their contemporaries, who might come to travel the same paths. The written work of today was the guidebook for tomorrow's travellers, which would help them find solutions for different and immediate problems.

This transmutation was also evident in the audience of readers, as demonstrated by the great number of texts in circulation, and the readers' thirst for them – texts where the journey was always omnipresent, even if it was not the essential element. The anticipation with which travel narratives were received revealed a growing cultural need for discovering the geographic reality of the world. Although very slowly, it gave rise to a picture of plausible worlds and led to the great expansion movement that began in the 1400s under the aegis of the Iberian kingdoms.

At this point, one final observation: the Middle Ages invented a new concept of travel in relation to previous periods, that is, throughout the Medieval centuries, with a great culmination in the Late Middle Ages, travel was seen not only as a physical endeavour, but also as an intellectual exercise, since the written word was intrinsic to it. In other words, the traveller was someone with a degree of literacy, learned, and thus able to actively influence the society of his time. The traveller transferred his experience and the knowledge he acquired to the community around him, of which he was a part.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> A. Crosby, *La Medida de la Realidad, La cuantificación y la sociedad occidental, 1250-1600* [The Measure of Reality, Quantification, and Western Society, 1250-1600] (Barcelona: Crítica, 1988).

<sup>123</sup> S. A. Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), vii-x, 1-18.

The journey was perceived also as a literary undertaking, and we see a reinvention of the classical ideals. In Antiquity the heroism of travellers entailed, above all, self-control in the face of temptations of the flesh, but also the work/effort of the hero. In the Middle Ages journeys were considered to be the triumph of willpower over the flesh, but also an intellectual endeavour orientated towards producing written evidence. As travel narratives gradually became a prominent feature in the medieval cultural landscape, the travelling hero also distinguished himself as a self-disciplined individual, who (now) adopts reading and writing practices. In this framework, literacy (of different types) has an original and important role in the formulation and rationalization of new and ennobling forms of mobility.

#### **IV. Final Notes**

In the turbulent advent of travel narratives, independently of the motivations and purposes that generated their emergence, we understand finally how much the attitude of medieval men and women has been changing in relation to human circulation and mobility. A slow but irreversible change occurred, a desire to broaden horizons and carry out critical self-analyses (which could even lead to a change in convictions), an inclination to transcend stereotypes and former preconceptions, inquisitiveness about new and different things, capacity for continuous adaptation to new realities, the ability and openness of spirit to find different solutions for new and repeated problems. The Medieval traveller – in particular the one from Late Middle Ages – is now increasingly an independent thinker capable of anthropological and sociological reflections. A true *Homo Viator*.

An individual whose imaginary is increasingly filled over the centuries with the symbolic dimension of travelling and the faraway spaces associated with it. A person who always moves and sees, either by way of the physical roads he travels on, or the initiatory paths that lead to the salvation of his soul.

In this sense, there is even a kind of closing of the circle, because, although with different contours (the very notion of pilgrimage is different, since it is no longer the monks – men and women – who travel and wander, but the mendicant friars and laymen), this late-medieval traveller somehow continues the idea of intense circulation and mobility that characterized the end of the ancient world and the dawn of the

Middle Ages. Finally, from a certain perspective, there is a resumption of the “freedom” that characterized these distant times, also of transition and profound change.

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