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*Peregrinatio ad Terram Sanctam. The Mediterranean geography of Christian wonders in the Book of the Infante Pedro of Portugal**

Abstract: The *Book of the Infante Pedro of Portugal* by Gomez of Santisteban constitutes a paradigm of the establishment of a Mediterranean geography of Christian wonders in the universe of Iberian medieval travel accounts, and more specifically of imaginary travels. We speak of a geography of desires and of the oneiric, that is of Hope, that which, inherited from classical antiquity, largely fulfilled the longings of the medieval (and especially late medieval) Christian. Indeed, there is no doubt about its contribution to fixing, in the late medieval collective mentality (and imaginary), a set of places of Christian *mirabilia* located in the area of influence of the Mediterranean Sea as spaces of memory to be retained by the culture of Western Christianity. It is our intention to reflect specifically on the Mediterranean component of this geography, that is to examine the relevance and the historical and cultural value of the first part of the narrative, corresponding to the pilgrimage of the Infante D. Pedro and his entourage to the Holy Land. Answers are sought to questions such as: what is the central logic of the marvelous element relating to the area of influence of the Mediterranean? To what anxieties and anguish does it respond? And what is the prodigy's role in structuring this first component of the text?

Keywords: marvelous, Holy Land, christian imaginary, pilgrimage, Infante D. Pedro of Portugal, Late Middle Ages.

Resumo: O *Livro do Infante D. Pedro de Portugal*, de Gomez de Santisteban, constitui um paradigma do estabelecimento de uma geografia de maravilhas Cristãs no universo dos relatos de viagens medievais ibéricas, e, mais especificamente, de viagens imaginárias. Falamos de uma geografia de desejos e do onírico, ou seja, da Esperança, aquela que, herdada da Antiguidade clássica, em grande parte preenchia os anseios do Cristão medieval (e especialmente num período medieval tardio). De facto, é inequívoca a sua contribuição para fixar na mentalidade (e no imaginário) colectiva(/os) do período medieval tardio um conjunto de lugares de *mirabilia* Cristã localizados na área de influência do Mar Mediterrâneo como espaços de memória a serem retidos pela cultura da Cristandade Ocidental. É nossa intenção refletir especificamente sobre a componente Mediterrânica desta geografia, ou seja, examinar a pertinência e o valor histórico-cultural da primeira parte da narrativa, correspondente à peregrinação do infante D. Pedro e respetivo séquito à Terra Santa. Procuram-se respostas para questões como, qual a lógica central do elemento maravilhoso relativo à área de influência do Mediterrâneo? A que anseios e angústias responde? E qual é o papel do prodígio na estruturação desta primeira componente do texto?

Palavras-chave: maravilhoso, Terra Santa, imaginário cristão, peregrinação, Infante D. Pedro de Portugal, Idade Média tardia.

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In the middle of the 14th century, after more than a century of opening and circulation, Asia once again became closed to Europeans. As a result, the memory of the voyages that have taken place begins to fade in the memory of Westerners, while the ancestral legends regain ground in the coeval mentality, and less true accounts begin to impose themselves as veridical.

Faced with a lack of first-hand information, imaginary journeys (or of “cabinet”) contributed to quenching readers’ thirst for news, assimilating these accounts into the already known, and truthful, accounts of missionaries and merchants, thus operating a complex connection between real and imaginary data, between actuality and tradition.¹ For us, today, such narratives are different from each other, but at the time they were not. The use of the so-called *Book of Knowledge* as a source for actual travels is proof of this fact.²

It is in this context that the *Book of the Infante Don Pedro of Portugal*,³ by the still unknown Gómez de Santisteban, is inserted.

The historical and cultural value of the *Book of the Infante Don Pedro of Portugal*

Dating back to the second half of the 15th century (c.1470), although it is likely to have circulated earlier, the *Libro* has been widely reproduced, and has therefore been widely disseminated.⁴ However, at the beginning of the 20th century, it became the target of reducers and simplistic evaluations by scholars such as Menéndez y Pelayo⁵ and the philologist Carolina Michaëlis of Vasconcelos.⁶

Critics of the text did not take into account that, as a case study of imaginary and late-medieval collective mentality, the *Libro* is particularly important because the image it transmits of the entourage of pilgrims (and in this case we are only referring to the first part of the text, the one on which our reflection is based) allows an analysis that goes way beyond the actual circumscribed context of the case, enabling more general questions to be addressed. A good example is the prevailing conception, among the inhabitants of the Western extremity of Europe at the end of the 15th century, of pilgrimage and of the *Other* inhabitant of the places that the same has as a final destination.

This is also the case because it includes in the list of places to visit the entire gallery of geographical, mythical and literary references that were shared by the scholars of his time, most notably the Holy Land, the mountains of Armenia, Mount Sinai, the kingdom of Prester John, the Terreal Paradise, the Amazons, and a whole host of wonders like the monstrous races and the fantastic animals. Indeed, through its content we can learn more about important aspects of medieval life and in particular of its imaginary.⁷

Finally, critics have fallen into the error of looking at a text dated from 500 years ago with the eyes of their own time, that is ignoring that the principle of credibility did not work for authors and readers of these books in the same way as for current ones. In fact, the readers of that time read the work according to a plurality of perspectives, being, like the authors, indifferent to the criterion of credibility.⁸ These perspectives determined the conception of the works themselves, as Hans Robert Jauss points out.⁹

1 JESÚS LACARRA 1989, 501.

2 RUSSELL 1981, 259-267; *id.* 1997, 401-416.

3 Henceforth the work is referred to in the abbreviated form: *Libro*.

4 About dating and authorship issues see FRANÇA 2015, 92-108; LIMA 2011, 4-20; ROGERS 1962, I-II; SHARRER 1976-1977, 85-98.

5 MENÉNDEZ Y PELAYO 1905, CDVII-CDXI.

6 VASCONCELOS 1922, 39-46.

7 FRANÇA 2015.

8 JESÚS LACARRA 1999, 78; ZUMTHOR 1994, 290.

9 JAUSS 1985, 3-45.

When applied to the Middle Ages, the distinction between “real” and “fictitious” thus becomes a non-operative exercise.¹⁰ The travel accounts –whether real or imaginary– alternate observations taken from reality with mythological description. The knowledge of space does not dissipate the legendary element, largely derived from antiquity and biblical tradition. They juxtapose themselves and complement each other in a discursive whole, regardless of the resulting contradictions.¹¹

Early in the Proem, Gomez of Santisteban declares its purpose: to satisfy the natural curiosity that all men have to know all the things of the world. Although people cannot be in the places described and have the experience of the adventures evoked, the author gives them the possibility of contacting and “feeling” through reading.¹² In addition to the informational purpose, the text has, unequivocally, a formative and enriching profile for those who read it. In this context, the credibility of the geography of the sacred provided by the Mediterranean –the space in which the permanently renewed presence of God is revealed– moreover serves as a guarantee for the final mission, to take place in the distant East, the one of Prester John.

The didactic feature of the work is, therefore, presented from the first moment. While informing, it is also intended to be formative. The protagonist is not the narrator; it is rather the Infante D. Pedro, who is accompanied by twelve companions –one of whom is the author of the text– and a translator who joins them in Castile.¹³

The *Libro* is divided into two main sections: the displacement to (and through) the Holy Land and, continuing the journey, the arrival at the court of the mythical Prester John, who so strongly marked the collective imaginary of medieval Christianity. The first part concerns the Infante as a pilgrim, while the second deals with the Infante as ambassador.¹⁴ Three spatial sequences correspond to these two parts, the second sequence functioning as a transitional territory between the two sections. Our reflection focuses exclusively on the first part of the text and on the figure of D. Pedro as a pilgrim traveler.

In essence, the *Libro* presents itself as an initiation to the enigmas that the world contains within its borders and especially to the sacred Christian enigmas. Travel, namely pilgrimage, then appears as the mechanism par excellence to reflect on Creation, time, space, diversity and unity. It then goes even further because, in another way, it is also assumed as a privileged vehicle for access to knowledge, as, indeed, we can verify in the words of the protagonist himself, a member of the highest Portuguese nobility: “[D. Pedro] was very desirous of seeing the world, having already determined to go to see the *departures of the world*”.¹⁵ After all, going through the world is also going through its mysteries, its interrogations, its past and its future.

In this respect, at the level of the imaginary, we can affirm that we are faced with a text that takes up the spirit of antiquity, where traveling was to see the wonders of the world, and at the same time, for the same reason, it has a close connection with the Muslim *Rhila*.¹⁶

Medieval man is tired of the triviality and the monotony of daily life and the nature that surrounds him. He tries, therefore, to escape from this world and find another that fills the emptiness that he feels. The imaginary thus constitutes his existence, as well as the immediate experience of the real. The *Libro* responds to this yearning for liberation. In addition to the information function, it plays a pragmatic role: to transport the reader to spaces far from the orderly center he knows so well, al-

10 JESÚS LACARRA 1989, 501.

11 ZUMTHOR 1994, 291.

12 SÁNCHEZ LASMARÍAS 2008, 11.

13 SÁNCHEZ LASMARÍAS 2008, 12.

14 LIMA 2011, 4-20.

15 SÁNCHEZ LASMARÍAS 2008, 12.

16 BATTÚTA 1997, 23-92; GIBB 1929; JANSSENS 1948.

lowing him to find the engines of escape from the insipidity of reality. In other words, projected in the space and time of the text, the reader does not just read it. He interiorizes it, taking on board the references provided by the author.

The Infante D. Pedro actually traveled widely through Europe between 1425 and 1428. Although it is possible to establish some correspondences between the real tour and the fictional text that we discuss here,¹⁷ the truth is that they correspond to different dimensions. However, such divergence in no way removes historical and cultural value from the *Libro*. Quite the contrary. The dimension of pilgrimage, which interests us here, is proof of this. On the other hand, both phenomena, the real journey and Gómez of Santisteban's narrative text, aim at the same process of legitimation: in the first case of a dynasty born in a way that is not in accordance with "international law"¹⁸ and in the second case in the sense of the recovery of the image of D. Pedro after the battle of Alfarrobeira,¹⁹ most particularly in the Iberian Peninsula.

In terms of medieval cultural contextualization, the *Libro* integrates the textual universe of travel narratives associated, on the one hand, with the pilgrimage to the Holy Land and, on the other, with the legend of Prester John.²⁰

D. Pedro pilgrim-traveler or the founding desire to think the mysteries of the world

In its entirety, this writing exercise presents as a guiding principle the spaces that really interest the medieval Christian, that is the landscapes where he recovers his spiritual identity in an eternal return: Mount Sinai, the Holy Land (the celestial Jerusalem) and the Indies of Prester John and the Apostle St. Thomas. It is the primacy of the geography of desires, hence the totalizing and ecumenical nature of the text.

The reader is, therefore, faced with a book of walk, stop and see. As previously mentioned, the aim of our analysis is the first section of the *Libro*, corresponding to the first space sequence of the journey, that is an itinerary of devotion to the Holy Land that has the city of Jerusalem as its center.

Before Jerusalem

Having followed the land route, after visiting Norway –another special place for the manifestation of the marvelous in the Middle Ages– and Babylon, D. Pedro and his companions arrive in the city of Vrrian, where they encounter its prodigious inhabitants, the centaurs, who live without any law.²¹ The particularity here lies in the proximity of such a hybrid being, originating from Greek mythology,²² to the Mediterranean world, where in medieval times the *mirabilia* of biblical tradition prevailed.

Then, even before entering the Holy Land, the pilgrims pass through the land of the Arabs, where the author records an important ethnographic detail, which also represents a remarkable exercise of alterity in the *Libro*:

17 ROGERS 1961.

18 MARQUES 1994, 137-172; MONTEIRO 1988, 89-103; NASCIMENTO 2012, 249-267; RAU 1964, 143-150; ROSA 2012; SOMMÉ 1998; VENTURA 1997.

19 Armed confrontation between the young king D. Afonso V (1432-1481) and the Infante D. Pedro his uncle, on May 20, 1449. MORENO 1973.

20 CORREIA 2000.

21 SÁNCHEZ LASMARIAS 2008, 14.

22 That is, inherited from the pagan tradition.

Then we passed through the land of Arabs who have no city or dwelling known to them, and at some point they move to mountains to eat herbs and raw, naked flesh, and they go naked. And from there we went away from these people who are so unreasonable and left and went to Anania, where St. Paul was baptized, to see the source of the Jordan River.²³

The problem of the evaluation of the *Other* arises directly here, for the knowledge of this *Other* (and of the *Self*) is always obtained through analogical reasoning: “I know the other by analogy with me.” However, this analogical reasoning has two levels. One is superficial and the other deeper and complex. Gomez of Santisteban’s text is mainly based on the former, that is the knowledge of the Arab (nomadic, we must point out) as the Other relies more, while the *Other* relies more on sensory/spontaneous perception, on the sympathy/antipathy duality and on intuition rather than on reflective knowledge, that is on the deep analysis of behaviors.

The cultural references of the anonymous author stand out here as a code that includes various classifications and values, namely those related to the Order and *civitas*. It is moreover on the basis of this referential code that the author values or devalues the *Other* that he faces.

From there they passed to Nazareth where, according to the author, the lineage of Santa Maria originated, continuing to fulfill their itinerary of visiting the sacred places (like Bethlehem, where Jesus Christ was born, and the place where the miraculous assumption of the Virgin Mary to Heaven happened) to reach Jerusalem, the apotheosis of the Christian path in the Holy Land, the place of the world sacralized by Christ Himself.

Urbs beata Hierusalem, dicta pacis Visio

On arrival in the Holy Land, pilgrim travelers do everything to reach the earthly (profane, physical, man-made) Jerusalem which, however, loses relevance to the centrality of the heavenly Jerusalem.²⁴ Pilgrimage is always a ritualistic journey of initiation. However, in this process, Jerusalem embodies the crossroads to which all the paths of the initiatory feat of the Christian lead, that is to say it is the *axis mundi*, whose central point is the Holy Sepulcher, the large temple where the absolute of medieval devotion congregated.²⁵

It is, therefore, the space par excellence of Christian nostalgia, ending up overlapping the other cities that are also mythical models for the Christian –Rome and Constantinople²⁶– or even the other great sanctuary: Santiago de Compostela. Jerusalem concentrates within itself a centrality and status as spiritual capital, thus proving the decisive influence of the biblical geography on medieval travel narratives.

As we can see in the text by Gomez of Santisteban, it represents the horizon of the Christian’s desires. After all, as *Urbs et civitas*, it was created by the architect God himself. Therefore it is totalizing for the believer in Christ: it is the great city of the Old Testament and it is the Church of the Messiah. Christians know that it was there that Jesus faced the powers of men, that he was condemned to death and crucified, and that the first disciples had the overwhelming experience that death did not have the last word, for Jesus is alive forever in God.

23 SÁNCHEZ LASMARIAS 2008, 14.

24 SÁNCHEZ LASMARIAS 2008, 15-16.

25 CORREIA 2000.

26 ZUMTHOR 1994, 108-137, 178-193.

It is Jerusalem that attributes sacred virtue to Christian temples throughout the world, as Honorius Augustodinensis points out in *De gemma animae*, book I, written in the first half of the 12th century: “The temple that the people build in peace in their earthly homeland symbolizes, in royal stones, the temple of glory built in the Celestial Jerusalem, in which the church exults in constant peace”.²⁷

A rich and unique space for its mystery and beatitude, Jerusalem allows the Christian to (re)discover the truth of his faith and, therefore, to rediscover himself in an initiatory movement. It enables him, from another angle and according to the winds of observance that have been traversing Europe (*devotio moderna*) since the last third of the 14th century, to question himself about his devotion and about what it really means to be a Christian, in a process of deep interiorization. This is a particularly pertinent scenario given that D. Pedro and his remaining family were assumed to be defenders of religious reform in Portugal.²⁸

The burden of mystery and consequently of quest (in the sense of demand, *quest*) of Jerusalem always remains for the true Christian, for within it lies the answer to all the aspirations of the devotee of Christ. Finally, it is a question of the space that the presence of the Messiah himself had sacralized.

The mountains of Armenia and Mount Sinai

The profoundly sacred nature of two of its places means that the initial part of the second spatial sequence of the text is also incorporated into any pilgrim itinerary to the Near East and consequently into our reflection. These are the mountains of Armenia and Mount Sinai in Egypt. Although more distant than Jerusalem, both are fundamental sacred spaces in the scope of a geography of the marvelous Christian founded in the Mediterranean basin.

Milk and honey (elements of a paradisiacal character) emanate from the lands of the mountains of Armenia. This is the location of Noah’s ark, one of the great Biblical references. There are also abundant powerful animals, like the elephant and the buffalo, as well as fantastic *animales*, such as, for example, the unicorn with its curative properties, the dragons and the flying vipers.²⁹ The pilgrim traveler thus encounters a land as sacred as it is prodigious, where the boundaries between the *mirabile* and the *miraculum* become fluid, as manifestations par excellence of transcendence. The biblical *topoi* of the land emanating milk and honey are a paradigmatic example of this ambiguity.³⁰

In turn, the Monastery of Saint Catherine in honor of the Christian martyr is located on Mount Sinai. A place of great sanctity and devotion, it constituted an example of very high Christian *mirabilia* at the time of the Infante D. Pedro. Built by order of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527-565), in the 15th century its location in a desert region greatly contributed to it becoming a major symbol of the ancient tradition of asceticism and, accordingly, an attraction for pilgrims. The author’s description is accompanied by intense religious fervor which indicates his didactic purpose and the deep spirituality that he intends to inculcate in this section of his text, which corresponds to a purely religious action: the *peregrinatio per amorem Christi*.

A sacred space of choice, the friars of the monastery of Jeronimos also inhabit Mount Sinai, where they practice the domestication of *mirabilia* animals, as is the case of unicorns, or possessors of qualities related to the marvelous (in the sense of *espantum*), the case of dromedaries with astonishing

27 *Apud* MIRANDA & SILVA 1995, 55.

28 Most particularly his father, D. João I (1385-1433), founder of the Avis dynasty, the Infante D. Duarte (1391-1438), his brother, who was king of Portugal (1433-1438), and Isabel of Portugal, Duchess of Burgundy (1397-1471).

29 SÁNCHEZ LASMARÍAS 2008, 16-17.

30 CORREIA 2000, 67-77.

force and speed.³¹ Finally, the real coexists with exotic fantasy on this genuine Christian “island”, as occurs on the mountains of Armenia at the level of zoology, where dragons and griffins live with serpents and scorpions.³²

Both these spaces are relatively homogeneous and well-known, both thanks to bookish tradition and to the oral testimony of the pilgrims who passed through them (we cannot forget that medieval society is a society more of “hearing” than of “seeing”³³). However, they are not safe spaces, as they are under the domain of the infidel. To go there means to pass through successive Muslim territories, namely belonging to the Turk. It implies, in other words, contact with the religious *Other*, the Muslim, that is the one which prevents the faithful of Christ from realizing their destiny on Earth. The situation is all the more serious the more distant the entourage is from the safety reference, the Mediterranean.

The importance of *peregrinatio*

As an account of the (imagined) pilgrimage of the Infante D. Pedro and his companions to the Holy Places of Palestine, the *Libro* translates in a modeling way the importance that the *peregrinatio* assumed in medieval spirituality and, at the same time, the deep devotion –in the sense of religious motivation– which led Christians to undertake such a long and dangerous journey.

In the specific case of the *Libro*, as motivations for the pilgrimage and because we speak of D. Pedro de Avis, we cannot dissociate from the spiritual dimension of acceding to universal truths, either the individual/private desire to know, or the ideals of cavalry, which are deeply imbued with Christian spirituality (the *miles christianus*).³⁴

By this we mean that the *Libro* is fictional, but the pilgrimage narrated in it is a mirror of the mentality of the time and, above all, of a figure like D. Pedro, of his yearnings and of his religiosity and worldliness. It therefore contributes to helping to draw, on the one hand, the collective profile of the late medieval Iberian Christian, and on the other the profile (individual) of a member of the royal family, that is the private and intimate side of man, the one more linked to emotional intelligence and, therefore, more difficult to access.

However, the didactic message of the first part of the *Libro* is also in the example to follow that it gives to the men of that time, namely the model of *Homo Peregrinus*, the man who walks in the name of God, from the day he is born until the day he abandons the earthly existence. In other words, it is the epic of those who seek something of God in the Land of men.³⁵ In this respect, Gómez of Santisteban’s text provides a suggestive, even seductive image that it is possible to reach the physical destination (the Holy Land and, above all, Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher) and thus attain spiritual destiny, that is salvation. The only condition is to have to travel, in this way experiencing the initiatory adventure of discovery and conquest of Truth, built according to the mythical model of a ritual itinerary, whose culmination lies in approaching the “Passion of Christ.” Hence, the strong connection that we consider to exist between the *Libro* and the medieval journey in the conceptual sense. After all, traveling in the Middle Ages means surpassing yourself at every moment, overcoming consecutive fears and obstacles, both supernatural and physical.

31 SÁNCHEZ LASMARÍAS 2008, 21-22.

32 CORREIA 2000, 67-77.

33 LE GOFF 1994, 25-53.

34 FLORI 1998.

35 MARTINS 1957, 7-40.

Final Notes

By fixing a set of places of *mirabilia* in the area of influence of the Mediterranean and further East as spaces of memory to be retained by the culture of Western Christianity, Gómez of Santisteban's narrative represents a paradigm of establishing a geography of the marvelous in the universe of medieval Iberian travel books.

It should not be forgotten that this geography is based on frontier mythology, in turn subordinated to a powerful logic of center-periphery, that is, as we move away from Western Christendom, cases of *mirabilia* increase in number and power. This is the case, although closer, of the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, where the essentials of Christian and Biblical *mirabilia* are concentrated. In other words, the further we move away from the limits of the known and order, the closer we are to the insecure, the chaos, and therefore the prodigious.

In its many facets and various constraints, the *Libro* shows how medieval man is essentially a *Homo Viator*: a man whose imaginary is over the centuries increasingly filled by the symbolic dimension of travel and the far-away spaces associated with it; a man who always walks and always sees, whether on the physical paths of the space he goes through, or along the initiatory paths that lead to the salvation of his soul.

On the other hand, while debating the possible worlds and glossing the knowledge compiled by the medieval encyclopedia, this book somehow emancipates itself from the spiritual constraints and the traditional limitation of knowledge and experience that marked typically medieval texts, which comparatively avenged a much more traditional and closed conception of the world.³⁶

This movement of transgression of the limits imposed by the *autorictas* is unmistakable in the *Libro*. Right from the start, such an achievement guarantees a well-demarcated place in the framework of the culture into which it is inserted.

This breaking of the "limits" also occurs at the level of the reading public, as evidenced by the considerable quantity of reproductions in circulation and the avid form in which they were received. Indeed, the expectation to which this travel narrative gave rise clearly demonstrates the growing cultural need to discover the geographical reality of the world, particularly of its limits, which was experienced in the Iberian Peninsula of the 15th and 16th centuries.³⁷

The singular criterion of verisimilitude that prevailed in the cultural system of the medieval reader guaranteed the reception of this narrative and its multiple *mirabilia* originating in the East, in particular by the peninsular nobility who found here an effective and seductive alternative to the immobility of the world proposed by ecclesiastical thought.

In turn, at the level of repercussions, we can affirm that the text influenced the civilization which witnessed its creation, in that it contributed to the expansion and enrichment of the imaginary of the time (and also, somewhat, to the extension of the horizon of knowledge itself). A practical example is that, in the first decade of the 16th century, the text already formed part of the readings of expedition members like Francisco Álvares (1465-1541), the author of the *True Information of the Lands of Prester John of the Indies*, published in Lisbon in 1540. When reporting on the lordship of Prester John a Portuguese Catholic cleric, Francisco Álvares, relates that it was very strange to find, in Ethiopia, a kingdom of female Amazons different from what the book of the Infante D. Pedro said.³⁸

36 CORREIA 2000, 11-20.

37 PRIEGO 1984, 234-238.

38 ÁLVARES 1889, 158.

This gives rise to an unequivocal fact: the *Libro*, like travel books in general –whether real or imaginary– offers a very clear vision of the conception of the world and of reality in the Middle Ages, while at the same time being an inescapable source to understand very different aspects of culture and mentality from the late medieval Iberian peninsula.

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