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***Libros de viajes*. A Study of Castilian Travel Accounts from the 15th Century on the Eve of the Great Geographical Discoveries**

This article is one of the elements of my studies devoted to Castilian travel accounts whose authors travelled to the East (Asia Minor and Central Asia) in the late Middle Ages. As I have already extensively analysed both the historical and the cultural background of this period and the travel accounts (*libros de viajes*) in which Ruy González de Clavijo and Pero Tafur described their expeditions,¹ these issues will be only briefly outlined here. My main focus here is the history of the publication of two Castilian travel accounts from the 15th century and their role as an element of the image building in both the Habsburg and Bourbon Spanish Dynasties of the 16th & 17th, and later 19th centuries, respectively.

At the beginning of the 15th century, Castile and other Christian countries in Europe cast anxious glances in the direction of Constantinople, fearful of the fate which would befall the capital of the Byzantine Empire at the hands of the steadily

1 Cf. Ł. Burkiewicz, "Two Christian Princesses offered as Timur's Present for King Henry III of Castile: The Analysis of the Introduction to Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo's Narrative (1403–1406)," *Perspektywy Kultury*, 13 (2015), pp. 159–178; idem, *Życie codzienne w podróży na przykładzie Ambasady do Tamerlana (1403–1406)*, *Z badań nad relacjami międzykulturowymi*, Kraków 2019; idem, "Kilka uwag na temat pochówku we wczesnej kulturze timurydzkiej (pocz. XV wieku) na podstawie kastylijskiej kroniki Embajada a Tamorlán (Ambasada do Tamerlana)," [in:] *Cmentarz – dziedzictwo materialne i duchowe*, eds. T. Klimowicz, A. Rybińska, M. Tarajko, Lublin 2021, pp. 123–138. I also analysed other issues related to Asian themes, travels, and contacts between the Islamic world and *christianitas latina*; cf. idem, "Rola arcybiskupa Jana z Sultanii w stosunkach dyplomatycznych pomiędzy Mongołami a Europą Zachodnią na przełomie XIV i XV w.," *Prace Historyczne Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 144 (2017), pp. 25–42; idem, "Europeans as Foreigners. Relations Between the West and Timur's Chagatai Empire at the Turn of the 14th and 15th Centuries: A Contribution to Studies on the Role Played by Embajada a Tamorlán in Contacts Between *christianitas latina* and the Mongols," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio F: Historia*, 73 (2018), pp. 83–103.

advancing Ottoman army.² A century later, three Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, i.e. Castile and León and Aragon, united to form a single monarchy called the Catholic Kings, ruled by Isabella and Ferdinand, initiating a process of expansion that would eventually create one of the greatest empires in history.³ The British historian John H. Plumb subtly observed that it was Columbus and the year 1492 that gave rise to the “American Dream,” so widespread in contemporary pop culture, and the subsequent conquests required additional measures taken by this monarchy while transforming it into an empire.⁴ Its rulers required support not only from the administrative apparatus but also from literature, particularly from accounts of travels and discoveries, which were supposed to spread the message of the special mission of Spain in the world and the significance of its conquests. A vital role in this process was played by *libros de viajes*, i.e. the Castilian accounts of the expeditions that preceded great well-known voyages and conquests, and their written accounts, by several decades.⁵

The year 1492 is not only a date symbolically associated with Columbus but also a crucial date in the history of Spanish literature and books: in that year the humanist Antonio de Nebrija (1441–1522) wrote the first grammar of the Spanish language, entitled *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, which he dedicated to Queen Isabella. It was also the first grammar of a modern language in Europe and one of the elements that confirmed the flourishing of humanistic studies in the monarchy of the Catholic Kings.⁶

Doubtless, it was Columbus who began a vital period in the history of the monarchy of the Catholic Kings, but his *Journal of the First Voyage (Diario del primer viaje)* is not the first account of a voyage which was written within the borders of the Aragonese-Castilian kingdom. An important strand of travel literature, the so-called “literature on India”, which also includes Columbus’s account, had its five minutes of renown in the history of the book.⁷ However, literary historians often forget about the Castilian travel accounts written by Ruy González de Clavijo and Pero Tafura in the first half of the 15th century, narrative texts known at the Castilian court long before manuscripts of Columbus or Cortes. These accounts – today included in the *libros de viajes* genre – more accurately described voyages to *Asia*, and not to America (India),

2 An excellent study of the situation in Europe at that time is given by Aziz S. Atiya in his work, which, although published over 100 years ago, is still up-to-date: *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages*, London 1938.

3 A successful account of the history of the Spanish Kingdoms in both Americas is given by an American researcher John H. Parry; cf. J. H. Plumb, *Wstęp*, [in:] J. H. Parry, *Morskie imperium Hiszpanii*, transl. S. Bławat, Gdańsk 1983.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 7.

5 Cf. introduction to the topic: F. López Estrada, *Libros de viajeros hispánicos medievales*, Madrid 2002.

6 B. Baczyńska, *Historia literatury hiszpańskiej*, Warszawa 2014, p. 95.

7 This group of works consists of descriptions of discoveries, explorations, voyages to and conquests of the New World and the history of America; Cf. Á. del Río, *Historia literatury hiszpańskiej*, vol. 1: *Od początków do 1700 roku*, transl. K. Piekarec, Warszawa 1970; B. Baczyńska, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–107.

but the important fact is that they broke with the tradition of the more “fantastic literature” popular in the Middle Ages, and greatly inspired later travel accounts.⁸

Medieval imagery and travel writing

Before medieval Europeans learned about the voyages of Columbus and his followers, the world they knew included Europe, Africa, and Asia. This horizon – both cultural and geographical – has already been extensively analysed in the subject literature.⁹ It suffices only to mention, following Jacques Le Goff, that in the Middle Ages monsters ‘achieved’ great success in literature, becoming the personification of what was both picturesque and terrifying.¹⁰ Medieval Europeans knew little about Asia, which was a kind of *terra incognita* for most of them. The *ecumene*, or the known world, was safe; the further Europeans ventured away from it, the more they encountered things unknown. Medieval people commonly associated the East not only with the Earthly Paradise, Jerusalem, and Asia, but also with a set of creatures which were totally different from anything the inhabitants of *christianitas latina* were familiar with.¹¹

Initially, knowledge about the countries of Asia was provided by pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and – starting at the end of the 11th century – the crusades led to an increased demand for information about the East.¹² The fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1291 gave rise to a new literary genre, namely memoirs of the crusades, which greatly expanded the geographical and cultural horizons of Europeans.¹³ Interest in

8 K. M. Daly, “Here There Be No Dragons: Maravilla in Two Fifteenth-century Spanish libros de viajes,” *Notandum*, 15/29 (2012), pp. 25–34.

9 Due to the limited space, I will mention only two valuable, in my opinion, reference works published in Polish, which provide an extensive list of the subject literature, see J. Strzelczyk, *Wstęp. Mongołowie a Europa. Stolica apostolska wobec problemu mongolskiego do połowy XIII wieku*, [in:] *Spotkanie dwóch światów. Stolica Apostolska a świat mongolski w połowie XIII w. Relacje powstałe w związku z misją Jana di Piano Carpiniego do Mongołów*, ed. J. Strzelczyk, Poznań 1993, pp. 12–21; M. Olszewski, “Meandry średniowiecznej etnologii,” [in:] Wilhelm z Rubruk, *Opis podróży*, transl. M. Olszewski, Kęty 2007, pp. 5–69.

10 J. Le Goff, *Długie średniowiecze*, transl. M. Żurowska, Warszawa 2007.

11 A set of strange creatures appeared in almost all descriptions of Asia; the rich literature on the peculiarities of the world described by medieval travellers and encyclopaedists is available, the reference works, Cf. K. Zalewska, “Mirabilia descripta. Osobliwości świata w piśmiennictwie geograficznym i kartografii średniowiecza,” *Ikonotheka*, 3 (1991), pp. 5–26; R. Wittkower, “Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942), pp. 159–197; V. U. Flint, “Monsters and the Antipodes in the Early Middle Ages and Enlightenment,” *Viator*, 15 (1984), pp. 65–80.

12 The first lasting effect of the Crusades, which translated into the geographical horizon of Europeans, was the treaty entitled *Obraz świata (Imago mundi)* written by Honorius of Autun (1080–1154); Cf. V. U. Flint, “Honorius Augustodunensis: Imago mundi,” *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, 57/49 (1982), pp. 7–153.

13 Their authors include, e.g. Fidentius of Padua, Thaddeus of Naples, Pierre Dubois, Guillaume de Nogaret, Galvano of Levant, Guillaume Adam, Guillaume Durand, Burchard,

Asia was further sparked when the Mongols, who were totally unknown to Europeans in the 13th century, appeared in Europe. After the Mongol invasion of Hungary and Poland in the years 1241 and 1242, a number of diplomatic missions to the East were undertaken by the Dominicans and Franciscans, called “agents of the papacy” by the French scholar Jean-Paul Roux.¹⁴ These first journeys were soon followed by other missionaries, and then by merchants, by representatives of other professions, and finally by diplomats. As a result, the 13th and 14th centuries witnessed a rapid development of travel literature devoted to Asia.¹⁵

A characteristic feature of most of these early descriptions was the inclusion of many fantastic elements in the accounts of travels and descriptions of places their authors visited, a genre expectation dictated by the expectations of their contemporary readers.¹⁶ Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the majority of medieval travel writing is classified as phantasmagoric literature.¹⁷ This term was introduced by Hinrich Fink-Eitel, a prominent historian of anthropology.¹⁸ The Czech literary scholar Eduard Petru went even further and used the term *Mythology Fiction* to describe the content of travel literature of that time.¹⁹

Benedetto Zaccaria, Ramon Llull, Hayton of Corycus, Marino Sanuto and the King of Cyprus Henry II of Lusignan, Cf. S. Atiya, op. cit., pp. 29–230; Ł. Burkiewicz, *Polityczna rola Królestwa Cypru w XIV wieku*, Kraków 2013, pp. 131–156.

14 J. P. Roux, *Średniowiecze szuka drogi w świat*, transl. T. Roślanowski, Warszawa 1969, p. 40. The missionary activity of the Franciscans and Dominicans has been the subject of numerous studies, Cf. J. Richard, *La Papauté et les Missions d'Orient au Moyen Age (XIII^e–XV^e siècles)*, Rome 1977.

15 Although the names of many Europeans who travelled to Asia in the Middle Ages are unknown, we do know the authors of some works which have survived to our times; these include, in chronological order, the Franciscan John of Pian de Carpine (1247), the Dominicans Simon of Saint-Quentin (1253) and William of Rubruck (1255), the Venetian merchant Marco Polo (1298), another Dominican, Jordan of Catalonia (1328), the Franciscans Odoric of Pordenone (1330) and John of Marignolli (ca. 1353), and the Dominican Archbishop John of Sultania (1404). The literature on these missions is so extensive and relatively easily accessible that I will not include it here.

16 It is worth mentioning that in the Christian world similar narratives aroused readers' great interest. Hence the large circulation of such works as the account of Marco Polo, which has survived till today in 143 manuscripts. One can imagine how large the edition must have been if so many copies of this work are still with us today.

17 It should be noted that medieval Arabic literature – in contrast to literature written within *christianitas latina* – generally does not contain literary fiction, although there are works of a somewhat fantastic nature, such as, among others, *The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor*; cf. M. Kowalska, *Średniowieczna arabska literatura podróżnicza*, Warszawa–Kraków 1973.

18 H. Fink-Eitel, *Die Philosophie und die Wilden. Über Bedeutung des Fremden für europäische Geistesgeschichte*, Hamburg 1994.

19 B. Małyż, *Najstarsza czeska relacja podróżnicza. Poselstwo Jerzego z Podiebradów do Francji w roku 1464 w świetle dziennika Jarostawa*, Czeski Cieszyn 2004.

The golden ages of Spain and *libros de viajes*

At first sight, the sea and the Pyrenees seem to geographically isolate the Iberian Peninsula from other countries. However, there has never been a cultural isolation because the Castilians, the Aragonese, and the Catalans were actively interested in what was happening not only near their own countries, but also on the outskirts of the world they knew.²⁰ A crucial element of the foreign policy under King Henry III (1390–1406) at the turn of the 15th century was his contact with Timur, to whom he sent a diplomatic mission headed by the courtier and envoy Ruy González de Clavijo.²¹ This mission to Timur produced one of the most important Castilian (thus also Spanish) travel accounts: *The embassy to Tamerlan (Embajada a Tamorlán)*, which literary historians treat as an example of *libros de viajes*.²² I analyzed this mission to Timur in my other works,²³ but it is worth mentioning here the opinion of the Spanish scholar Rodrigo Vizcaíno, who observed that this “titanic” expedition beyond the borders of the “world known to a typical representative of Latin civilization produced an account which resembles an accurate and objective ethnographic description.”²⁴

20 It is worth mentioning here at least Castilian merchants, active throughout the Middle Ages, and the Catalan Company, a mercenary army commanded by Roger de Flor, which from 1303 was in the service of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus; see K. M. Setton, *Catalan Domination of Athens 1311–1388*, Cambridge 1948.

21 Cf. C. Montojo Jiménez, *La diplomacia castellana bajo Enrique III: estudio preliminar de la embajada de Ruy González de Clavijo a la corte de Tamerlán*, Madrid 2004; F. López Estrada, “Ruy González de Clavijo: La embajada a Tamorlán: relato del viaje hasta Samarcanda y regreso (1403–1406),” *Arbor*, 711–712 (2005), pp. 516, 518. It is worth mentioning that the mission in which Clavijo participated was the second we know of sent by King Henry III to Timur. The first mission left Castile in the spring of 1402 and the ambassadors then met the Chagatai leader at Ankara, where he was celebrating his victory over Sultan Bayezid; Cf. Ł. Burkiewicz, “Two Christian Princesses...,” pp. 159–178.

22 Cf. K. Zygmunt, *Construyendo una poética para el relato de viaje en la Edad Media: entre la Embajada a Tamorlán y Andanças y viajes de Pero Tafur*, [in:] *Entresiglos: de la Edad Media al Siglo de Oro (II). Estudios en homenaje al profesor Joan Oleza*, eds. J. Badía, L. C. Souto, València 2020.

23 The history of the expedition was described in Polish by Łukasz Burkiewicz in his book entitled *Życie codzienne w podróży na przykładzie Ambasady do Tamerlana (1403–1406). Z badań nad relacjami międzykulturowymi*, Kraków 2019; Burkiewicz also mentions this in his articles, which is why it will not be described here. Extensive subject literature in various languages can be found in References in these works.

24 R. Vizcaíno, *La objetividad narrativa en la Embajada a Tamorlan*, [in:] *Actas del XIII Congreso Internacional Asociación Hispanica de Literatura Medieval, (Valladolid, 15 a 19 de septiembre de 2009)*. In *memoriam Alan Deyermond*, vol. 2, eds. J. M. Fradejas Rueda, D. D. Smithbauer, D. Martin Sanz, J. Diez Garretas, Valladolid 2010. The best known (contemporary) publication of this narrative is an edition by the Spanish scholar Francisco López Estrada: *Ruy González de Clavijo, Embajada a Tamorlán, estudio y edición de un manuscrito del siglo XV por Francisco López Estrada*, Madrid 1943. Revised edition published, Madrid: 1999). In addition, I recommend reading an excellent foreword by the same author, who is the

Three decades after Clavijo's return from Samarkand, on the wave of the development of the Castilian Kingdom, Pero Tafur, a courtier to Henry III's son, King John II (1406–1454) and a diplomat in his service, set out on his journey. Between 1436 and 1439, Tafur visited three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa, which together constitute nearly the entire European ecumene of the time.²⁵ Unlike Clavijo's journeys, the expeditions undertaken by Tafur did not have one specific goal; some scholars consider him a merchant, while for others he is a pioneering tourist.²⁶ Many years after he returned from his journeys, probably motivated by the fall of Constantinople, Pero Tafur decided to write down his memories and entitled them *Adventures and Travels of Pero Tafur to Various Parts of the World* (*Andanzas y viayes de Pero Tafur por diversas partes del mundo*).²⁷

Karen M. Daly observed that what distinguishes the Castilian *libros de viajes* of the first half of the 15th century from previous travel accounts is their treatment of *miracles*. Clavijo's and Tafur's travel accounts clearly break with the tradition of "fantastic literature".²⁸ Their books lack the grotesque anthropomorphic creatures that regularly appeared in earlier travel literature.²⁹ Instead, Clavijo and Tafur rejected the uncritical adoption of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic fantasies of classical ancient authors and of medieval chroniclers and encyclopaedists who copied from them and replaced these with accurate descriptions of the world. Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego called this a transition from "lo maravilloso fantástico" to "lo maravilloso real".³⁰

greatest expert on the issue, which served as an introductory summary of the subject; see F. López Estrada, "Ruy González de Clavijo...", pp. 515–535.

25 Reference works: F. Meregalli, "Las memorias de Pero Tafur, Dicenda," *Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica*, 6 (1987), pp. 297–305; M. W. Labarge, "Pero Tafur: A Fifteenth-Century Spaniard," *Florilegium*, 5 (1983), pp. 237–246; F. J. Villalba Ruiz de Toledo, "El viaje de Don Pero Tafur (1436–1439)," *Arbor*, 711–712 (2005), pp. 537–550; P. Martínez García, "Andanzas e viajes: El otro Pero Tafur," *Edad Media: Revista Histórica*, 11 (2010), pp. 263–284; R. Beltrán, "Pero Tafur and Bertrand de la Broquière in Constantinople: The Ceremonial Image of Mary of Trabzond and the Diplomatic Meetings around the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1439)," *Medievalia*, 21 (2018), pp. 25–74; P. Castro Hernández, "Monstruos, prodigios y maravillas en los viajes de Pero Tafur," *Medievalista*, 20 (2016), pp. 1–25.

26 J. Fitzmaurice-Kelly, *Historia de la literatura española*, Madrid 1926, p. 98; M. W. Labarge, "Pero Tafur...", pp. 237–239.

27 Cf. The basic edition of the narrative: Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures 1435–1439*, London 2004.

28 Miracles (*mirabilia*) inhabited the medieval mindset and were an expected feature of travel narratives. One of the titles of Marco Polo's works is *De mirabilibus mundi* (*The Wonders of the World*), which, with time, replaced its original title *Le divisament dou monde* (*The Description of the World*); this reveals its readers' expectations and the understanding of these expectations by the author and his editor (we know that Marco Polo preserved his work through his collaboration with Rustichello da Pisa); Cf. H. R. Jaus, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, transl. T. Bahti, Minneapolis 1982; K. M. Daly, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–34.

29 Cf. K. Zygmunt, *Construyendo una poética...*, pp. 557–559.

30 M. Á. Pérez Priego, "Estudio literario de los libros de viajes medievales", *Epos*, 1 (1984), pp. 230–231.

Neither Clavijo's nor Tafur's travel accounts gained immediate recognition. Timur's death in 1405 and the death of King Henry III a year later naturally brought this line of potential collaboration to an end because these parties were, collectively, the addressees and the sender of the diplomatic mission. After Timur's death, his empire was subject to a war of succession, and the resulting chaos led to its disintegration. Pedro Tafur's information and descriptions were also of little interest. In 1453, Constantinople was captured by the Turks, and, consequently, the eastern trade routes were closed. The disintegration of the Timurian empire and the fall of Constantinople led to a situation in which the Castilian *libros de viajes* lost their potential to be used as guide books by future expeditions to the East.³¹ Admittedly, they prepared the way for voyages of Columbus and his followers, but they were not met with interest of their contemporaries. Moreover, the end of the Middle Ages finished the period of interest in travel narratives; as Paul Zumthor aptly observed, readers seemed to have been sated with this literary genre.³² However, Clavijo's and Tafur's travel manuscripts were rediscovered and read widely in the next century, and this Spanish rebirth of interest in *libros de viajes* was brought about by two main factors.

First, in the 15th century, Castile and other regions of present-day Spain came under the influence of Italian humanism, which was characterised by the flourishing of literary forms associated with the chivalric culture of the late Middle Ages. Humanists from Italy were especially active in Castile and Aragon after Alfonso the Magnanimous became the king of Naples in 1442. In addition, at the turn of the 15th century, the Castilian language—today treated as the Spanish proper—emancipated Spanish artistic expression. As I have already mentioned, the first grammar of the Spanish language (1492) was also the very first grammar of *any* modern language. Moreover, the development of the printing press on the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century became a decisive factor in the consolidation of new literary genres, which began to move away from fictional literature. There was a clear distinction between *fictional* narratives and *historical* works, and some of the latter authors attacked the former, accusing them of “spreading fairy tales”.³³ All this contributed to the flourishing of art and literature on the Iberian Peninsula in the 16th and 17th centuries, which translated into the highest percentage of people holding a university degree. This period in the history of Spanish literature is called the Golden Age (*siglos de oro*), and is frequently regarded as the period in which writing on the peninsula reached its highest levels of excellence, especially when compared to the literature of the 18th and 19th centuries.³⁴ During this period, valuable manuscripts that had before received little attention were revisited.

31 S. Carrizo Rueda, “Tradiciones tópicas y propósitos de objetividad en la Embajada a Tamorlán,” *Revista de literatura medieval*, 4 (1992), pp. 80–81.

32 P. Zumthor, “The Medieval Travel Narrative,” *New Literary History*, 25 (1994), p. 809.

33 B. Baczyńska, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64, 75–78.

34 There is an ongoing argument in the history of Spanish literature regarding the importance of the 16th and 17th centuries for the development of Spanish-language writing; however, it seems that the number of great writers of this era much exceeds that of other periods. They include Cervantes, Calderon, Lope de Vega, Quevedo, and Gongora;

Second, it should be remembered that the 15th century brought about significant political, economic, and social events that led to the transformation of Spain into the most powerful European country. The conquest of Naples by Alfonso the Magnanimous in 1443 gave Aragon hegemony over the Apennine peninsula, and in the same year Alfonso became King of Naples (he already held the titles of King of Aragon, Sardinia, and Corsica).³⁵ The marriage of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon in 1469 ended the long-standing internal struggles and dynastic disputes among the Pyrenees countries. The conquest of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the peninsula, in early January 1492, ended both centuries of fighting against the Arab expansion and the Reconquista. This event, together with the subsequent incorporation of the Kingdom of Navarre (1512) into the monarchy established by Ferdinand and Isabella, was the final stage in the process of territorial unification of the country known under the name of an old Roman province, *Hispania* (i.e. Spain).³⁶ The discovery of the islet of Guanahani and the much larger islands of Cuba in October 1492 and Haiti in December of the same year marked the beginning of the period of geographical expansion, bringing Spain enormous colonized areas and sources of wealth. Thus, we obtain a picture of a strong and powerful country.

A travel narrative as a propaganda tool

Queen Isabella died in 1504, and the Castilian throne was inherited by her daughter Joanna the Mad. Through her marriage to Philip I of Habsburg, the rich lands of the Netherlands became part of Spain. Their son Charles, since 1517 ruler of the united kingdoms of Aragon and Castile—and since 1519 Holy Roman Emperor—took the name of Charles V. The main aim of his policy, and later that of his son Philip II, was to strengthen their empire in Western Europe and to secure Spanish hegemony in both the Old and New Worlds. During that time Spanish conquistadors made great conquests in the New World: Cortes conquered the Aztecs in Mexico (1519–1521), Pizarro conquered the Inca kingdom in Peru (1531–1533), Almagro conquered Chile (1535),

Cf. M. Strzałkowa, *Historia literatury hiszpańskiej. Zarys*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1966, p. 64 et seq; del Río, op. cit., p. 187 et seq.

35 Cf. R. Hryszko, “The Sweet War, or How Military Campaigns of Alfonso V of Aragon Affected the Eating Habits in Early to Mid-15th Century,” *Perspektywy Kultury*, 26 (2020), pp. 135–159.

36 F. Bajo Álvarez, J. G. Pecharromán, *Historia de España*, Madrid 2000, pp. 83–84. Most historians, especially the earlier ones, considered the Catholic Kings, namely Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, the founders of modern Spain. However, this thesis is now increasingly being debated. Representatives of more recent historiography argue that until the 18th century and the reign of Charles III of Bourbon (1759–1788), it is impossible to talk of the kings of Spain as well as of Spain itself. Some scholars even claim that, during its long history, Spain failed to form itself into a homogeneous nation. On reflections on the Spanishness of Spain itself see F. Kubiacyk, “Monarchia kastylijsko-aragońska czy Hiszpania? Wokół sporu o model państwa Królów Katolickich (1474–1516),” *Studia Europaea Gnesnensia*, 1–2 (2010), pp. 43–71; the subject literature in Spanish can be found there.

and Miguel López de Legazpi founded the first Spanish colony in the Philippines (1565). The rapid increase in the number of colonies at that time accompanied the consolidation of absolutism in Spain.³⁷ The literature from this period also developed in two directions: first, it acted as official propaganda of Charles V and Philip II, in which their empire was glorified; second, it focused on conquests and discoveries,³⁸ as their accounts were intended to spread the message of Spain's special role in the world and the greatness of its discoveries and conquests.³⁹ *Libros de viajes*, and in particular *The Embassy to Tamerlan*, which had been forgotten for over a century, were thus revisited.

The first printing houses were opened in Spain around 1472, and contemporary humanists emphasised their formative role in promoting reading. This view was also adopted by the Spanish rulers, who supported the development of printing. Gonzalo Argote de Molina (1548–1596) from Seville, an art collector, poet, writer, and soldier, was among those who were beneficiaries of such support.⁴⁰ He was an exceptionally zealous collector of art and literature, highly respected by King Philip II, who visited him in his house at least once in 1570⁴¹. His library held many valuable manuscripts, including *Libro de la montería de Alfonso XI*, *El conde Lucanor*, and Clavijo's account of his mission to Timur.⁴² Molina published *The Embassy to Tamerlan* and based his edition on one of the manuscripts now kept in the National Library of Madrid. He wrote a short introduction to this edition and dedicated it to the secretary of King Philip II, Antonio Pérez del Hierro (1540–1611), which may be treated as evidence of Molina's links with the king or even of the king's pressure to publish this book.⁴³ The depiction of Spain's vigorous foreign policy, almost a century before Columbus'

37 Cf. M. Tuñón de Lara, J. Valdeón Baruque, A. Domínguez Ortiz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, transl. S. Jędrusiak, Kraków 1997; T. Michałowski, P. Machcewicz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1998.

38 P. Brummett, *Introduction: Genre, Witness, and Time in the 'Book' of Travels*, [in:] *The 'Book' of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700*, ed. P. Brummett, Boston-Leiden 2009.

39 M. Strzałkowa, op. cit., pp. 75–76.

40 Cf. A. Palma Chaguaceda, *El historiador Gonzalo Argote de Molina: estudio biográfico, bibliográfico y crítico*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 1973; D. Santonocito, *Gonzalo Argote de Molina, editor de textos medievales*, Berlin 2020.

41 A. Palma Chaguaceda, op. cit., pp. 116–122.

42 Four manuscripts of the Embassy to Tamerlan have survived to the present day. Three of them were written in the Castilian dialect and can be found in: (two of them) the National Library of Madrid: *Embajada a Tamorlán*, MS 18050 and MS 9218, Biblioteca Nacional Madrid; (one, incomplete) Royal Library of Madrid: *Embajada a Tamorlán*, MS 2-2527: folder 115r, volume 168, Real Biblioteca de Palacio Madrid; (one, in the Aragonese dialect) is kept in the British Museum in London: *Embajada a Tamorlán*, MS 16613, folder 1r, volume 125.

43 *Historia del Gran Tamerlán e itinerario y enarración del viaje y relación de la embajada que Ruy González de Clavijo le hizo, por mandado del muy poderoso Señor Rey Don Henrique el Tercero de Castilla [Texte imprimé]; Y un breve discurso fecho por Gonçalo Argote de Molina para mayor inteligencia deste libro*, impresso en Sevilla, en casa de Andrea Pescioni, Sevilla 1582.

expedition, was intended to demonstrate the mission of the Spanish rulers. In his edition, Molina also included two descriptions of Timur's life and achievements written by Pedro Mejia (Pero Mexia, 1497–1551), a Castilian humanist⁴⁴, and Paolo Giovio (Pablo Jovio, 1483–1552), Bishop of Nocera in southern Italy⁴⁵. We now know that the intention of both the publisher and his patron, King Philip II, was to use this book as an element of image-building for the Spanish empire.⁴⁶ This attempt was successful, as the popularity of the first edition of *The Embassy to Tamerlan* increased recognition of Timur and his empire.

In 1700 Charles II, the last Habsburg on the Spanish throne, died childless. He was succeeded by Philip V of the Bourbon dynasty. The Bourbons' rise to power in Spain was accompanied by the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) and also of domination in Europe. At that time, Spain's position was undoubtedly weaker than in the past, and definitely much worse than in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) changed the balance of power in the world: it weakened Spain and strengthened Britain. Although the Spanish Bourbons still considered themselves powerful monarchs, France treated Spain as a subordinate country. It became necessary to revive the great Spanish victories and expeditions of the past. In 1782, encouraged by the court of King Charles III, Antonio de Sancha (1720–1790), a printer from Madrid, published *The Embassy to Tamerlan*, based on the manuscript kept in Madrid (the same as in Molina's edition).⁴⁷ This version included Timur's biography written much earlier by García de Silva Figueroa (1550–1624) from Badajoz, an ambassador to the Persian Court for King Philip III of Habsburg (1598–1621).⁴⁸ In the 18th and 19th centuries, the importance of *The Embassy to Tamerlan* grew, and it was increasingly used as a valuable historical source, as noted by Jose María Blanco y Crespo (Joseph Blanco White, 1775–1841), a poet and theologian who recognised its value when he reviewed the versions published by Gonzalo Argote de Molina.⁴⁹

The history of the publication of Pero Tafur's manuscript was different, and it shared the fate of other travellers' accounts. Interestingly, although humanism drew on their experiences, scholars, geographers, and cosmographers made little use of the textual works of great travellers of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, many of them

44 *Vida del Gran Tamorlan escrita por Pero Mexia, cronista de su Magestad, en el capitulo XXVIII (parte segunda) de su silva de varia lecion*, [in:] *Historia del gran Tamorlan, e itinerario y enarracion del viage, y relacion de la embajada que Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo le hizo por mandado del muy poderoso señor rey Don Henrique el Tercero de Castilla: y un breve discurso fecho por Gonzalo Argote de Molina*, Segunda impresion, a que se ha anadido la vida del gran Tamorlan sacada de los comentarios, que escribió Don Garcia de Silva y Figueroa, en la imprenta de Don Antonio de Sancha, Madrid 1782, pp. 10–17.

45 *Vida del Gran Tamorlan escrita por Paulo Iovio, Obispo de Nochera, en sus elogios traducidos por el licenciado Gaspar de Baeza*, [in:] *Historia del gran Tamorlan...*, pp. 18–24.

46 P. Brummet, op. cit., pp. 7, 9.

47 *Historia del gran Tamorlan...*

48 L. Gil, *Epistolario diplomático de D. García De Silva y Figueroa*, Cáceres 1989.

49 J. Blanco-White, "Review of *Historia del Gran Tamorlán*," *Variedades O mensagero de Londres*, 1 (1824), pp. 316–330.

looked upon their accomplishments with contempt: e.g. William of Rubruck's account remained unknown until the 16th century, and Christopher Columbus did not become famous until the 19th century.⁵⁰

Tafur's account, entitled *Andanças é viajes de Pero Tafur por diversas partes del mundo ávidos (1435–1439)*, was first published in 1874 by Marcos Jiménez de la Espada (1831–1898), as the eight volume of the series *Colección de Libros Españoles raros ó curiosos*.⁵¹ Espada was a writer, scientist, member of the Academy of Sciences, and a founder of the Geographical Society of Madrid.⁵² He published the only manuscript of Tafur's narrative that survived to that time, kept in the Bibliotheca Patrimonial. Interestingly, his source was a manuscript made in the early 18th century, which was itself a copy of an earlier manuscript. To this day it is not known what happened to the original manuscript and whether other copies of Tafur's work have survived. Espada's edition is of a high standard; apart from the Castilian text of Tafur's account, it includes an introduction, a geographical and bibliographical guide, footnotes, and a glossary of difficult terms.⁵³

While discussing Marcos Jiménez de la Espada's edition, it is necessary to consider the declining position of Spain in the second half of the 19th century, a period marked by problems and instability. The Napoleonic Wars, the First Carlist War (1833–1839), the First Republic (1873–1874), and the restoration of the Bourbons (1874) made for a turbulent period, devoid of any long-lasting peace. Not surprisingly, contemporary Spaniards looked longingly towards the former glory days of Castile, Aragon, and later Spain. The publication of Tafur's work and Espada's other activities served the purpose of fostering the memory of the time of great travels, discoveries, of Spain's mission in the world, and—in the case of Tafur's book—of supporting the Bourbons' claim to the Spanish throne.

Both Clavijo's and Tafur's travel accounts have been published in many languages and are today used by scholars within many scientific disciplines: historians, art historians, literary experts, cultural scientists, philologists, archaeologists, ethnographers, ethnologists, and many others.

Conclusions

Most people associate the great voyages and geographical discoveries of the late Middle Ages and the early modern era with Columbus. Popular culture has helped to

50 P. Zumthor, op. cit. Against the background of this scant interest in travel narratives in the modern era, Marco Polo's account entitled *De Mirabilibus Mundi*, looks very good. This manuscript was frequently copied due to its imagery, mostly fantastic, which responded to the needs of the then-contemporary "publishing market."

51 *Andanças y viajes de Pero Tafur: por diversas partes del mundo ávidos (1435–1439)*, Madrid 1874.

52 A. A. Vasiliev, "Pero Tafur, a Spanish Traveller of the Fifteenth Century and His Visit to Constantinople, Trebizond and Italy," *Byzantion*, 7/1 (1932), pp. 75–122.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

consolidate this opinion. After all, many present-day readers of *libros de viajes* will remember the scene from Ridley Scott's movie *1492: Conquest of Paradise*, when the French actor Gérard Depardieu, who played Christopher Columbus, walks ashore on the sandy beach of the island of Guanahani (San Salvador) to the sounds of Vangelis' music.⁵⁴ Columbus, of course, left the accounts of his voyages, and they entered the canon of "literature on India", but, as I have attempted to emphasise here, much of the great Spanish travel literature was written earlier, at the dawn of the great geographical discoveries. The popularity of Clavijo's and Tafur's narratives in the years immediately preceding the period of the great geographical discovery is evidence to a growing contemporary curiosity about the world. Moreover, the texts confirm Castile's interest in matters of great international politics.⁵⁵

The role played by these two travel accounts is significant. Above all, they influenced the development of cultural diversity that took place in the 15th century and, consequently, the changes in the attitudes towards this phenomenon. Both Clavijo and Tafur were interested in many aspects of life in the places they visited, including those that concerned very mundane matters. Their *ethnographic* descriptions broke with fiction in literature and considerably differed from *fantastic* accounts of earlier travel narratives. Their popularity coincided with the dominance of Spain, which was at the centre of European politics of the period. The gold of the Aztecs and the silver of Peru laid the foundations of a global empire that stretched from Mexico through Madrid to Manila, and this great expansion needed support in literature that would spread the message of Spain's special mission in the world, of Spanish greatness, Spanish discoveries, and Spanish conquests. Both the Habsburgs and the Bourbons encouraged bibliophiles, writers, and artists to publish manuscripts, hoping this would support their policies.

To this day, *The Embassy to Tamerlan* plays an important role in Spanish historical novels, whose authors willingly borrow information and take inspiration from this medieval account of the journey of the Castilian envoys.⁵⁶

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54 Columbus and his companions reached the island of Guanahani in the Bahamas archipelago on 12 October 1492. The Bulgarian cultural scholar, Tzvetan Todorov, in his monumental work *The Conquest of America: the problem of the other* (original in French: *La Conquête de l'Amérique. La question de l'autre*, Paris 1982) called this event the most important encounter in the history of mankind; Cf. T. Todorov, *Podbój Ameryki: problem innego*, transl. J. Wojcieszak, Warszawa 1996.

55 B. Baczyńska, op. cit., p. 77.

56 K. Zygmunt, "La Ruta de la Seda: entre el relato medieval, la novela histórica y los textos contemporáneos," *Quaderns de Filologia: Estudis Literaris*, 23 (2018), pp. 63–78; idem, "El descubrimiento de la fauna exótica en los relatos de viajes: de las descripciones medievales a las imitaciones en la novela histórica contemporánea", *Lectura y Signo*, 11 (2016), pp. 59–81.

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 15th century, Castile, like other countries located on the Iberian Peninsula, was struggling with a range of internal problems. Before it reached – together with Aragon – greatness as the Monarchy of the Catholic Kings, it had already taken an active interest in far-away lands, and its representatives made distant journeys, which they described in detail in their travel accounts. Over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, Spain became a great power both externally and internally, and this period is often called the Golden Ages (*siglos de oro*) of Spanish literature. This was undoubtedly the period in which literature written on the Iberian Peninsula itself reached its highest level of excellence. Moreover, some literary genres, especially historiography and accounts of travels, conquests, and discoveries, became a tool of Charles V's and Philip II's official propaganda: they glorified their empire and passed on the message of Spain's special role in the world and the greatness of its discoveries and conquests. Against this background, the article discusses the role and history of the publication of two fifteenth-century Castilian travel accounts, or *libros de viajes*, which report the expeditions of Ruy González de Clavijo and Pero Tafur. Their narratives were key elements of the image Spanish rulers crafted for themselves during both the Habsburg dynasty of the 16th and 17th centuries and the Bourbon dynasty of the 19th century.

Keywords: Castile, *libros de viajes*, travels, Asia, travel account, travel book.

Słowa kluczowe: Kastylia, *libros de viajes*, podróże, Azja, relacja podróżnicze, książka podróżnicza.