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Fifteenth-century Castilian travel accounts as an example of relations between representatives of the *christianitas latina* and the Asian East¹

Christopher Columbus' discovery of America is such a momentous event in the history of the world that even people with little interest in historical studies are familiar with it. The tomb of this great explorer can be found in the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Seville, the largest Gothic cathedral in Europe, which reflects the power of the Castilian-Aragonese monarchy. At least three symbols are associated with the cathedral. First, it was built on the ruins of a mosque once erected by the Muslim Almohad dynasty; thus it symbolises the Reconquista. Second, the tomb of Columbus, whose coffin is supported by figures personifying the rulers of Castile, León, Navarre, and Aragon, reminds us of the time of the great geographical discoveries which shaped Castile and Aragon and future Spain.² Third, a stone's throw from the cathedral we can find the *Archivo General de Indias* (the General Archive of the Indies), where the manuscripts of works written by great explorers are kept. These are valuable

1 The article was written as part of the research project funded by the National Science Centre within the Miniatura 3 programme, number 2019/03/X/HS3/00745 (Travel as a culture creating element. Cross-cultural relations based on the example of the travel chronicle "Embajada a Tamorlan" (1403–1406)). / Publikacja powstała w wyniku realizacji projektu badawczego finansowanego ze środków Narodowego Centrum Nauki w ramach programu Miniatura 3 o numerze 2019/03/X/HS3/00745 (Podróż jako element kulturotwórczy. Relacje międzykulturowe na przykładzie kroniki z podróży "Embajada a Tamorlan" (1403–1406)).

2 At this point, it is worth mentioning a dispute which continues to this day, regarding the posthumous fate of Columbus' body and his present burial place. Columbus died on 20 May 1506 in Valladolid in Spain, where he was buried; in 1509 his coffin was transferred to Seville. As he had expressed a wish to be buried in America, in 1537, his coffin was transferred to the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Supposedly, in the following centuries, Columbus' ashes were returned to Spain via Cuba. Many articles and materials dedicated to this issue have been published; an interesting anthropological and historical analysis can be found in the text written by M.J. Álvarez-Cubero, L.J. Mtnez.-Gonzalez, M. Saiz, J.C. Álvarez, and J.A. Lorente, *Nuevas aplicaciones en identificación genética*, "Cuadernos de Medicina Forense", vol. 16, no. 1–2 (2010), pp. 5–18.

sources of knowledge about Spanish political, social, cultural, and economic activity in America and the Philippines, as well as of their authors' geographical knowledge about these areas.

The Middle Ages left us a large and magnificent collection of books of great literary and historiographical significance.³ Their literary value was not always recognised, as they were primarily used as sources of geographical and historical knowledge.⁴ Columbus' *Diario de a bordo del primer viaje de Cristóbal Colón* ("Diary of Columbus' First Voyage") was not the first travel account written by an Aragonese-Castilian traveller of that period.⁵ It was the very first travel narrative whose author described an expedition to the West Indies, which represents the genre of "literature on India", but it was preceded by accounts of travels to other places. Historians often forget about the canon of Castilian medieval accounts; that is, two *libros de viajes* written at the turn of the 15th century. One was by a member (or members) of the expedition to Samarkand (1403–1405) led by Ruy González de Clavijo; the other by Pero Tafur, who between 1436 and 1439 led an expedition around three continents.⁶ In this article I will refer to the cross-cultural relations between representatives of the *christianitas latina* and the Asian East, based only on these two Castilian travel accounts.⁷

3 There is growing interest in medieval and early modern accounts written by travellers from the territories of today's Spain. See, among others, the relatively recent collective work *Viajeros en China y libros de viajes a Oriente: (siglos XIV-XVII)*, ed. R. Beltrán Llavador, Colección Parnaseo, 35, Valencia 2019; particularly an interesting chapter written by Joaquín Rubio Tovar entitled *Los viajeros medievales y las lenguas*, in: *Viajeros en China y libros de viajes a Oriente: (siglos XIV-XVII)*, ed. R. Beltrán Llavador, Colección Parnaseo, 35, Valencia 2019, pp. 49–74; and *A 500 Años de la primera vuelta al mundo: una mirada histórica a la expedición Magallanes-Elcano*, coords. E.J. Luque Azcona, J. Miranda Bonilla, Colección Textos Institucionales, no. 99, Sevilla 2022.

4 A broad perspective on the role played by *libros de viajes* was presented by Rafael Beltrán Llavador in his article *Los libros de viajes medievales castellanos Introducción al panorama crítico actual: ¿cuántos libros de viajes medievales castellanos?*, "Revista de filología románica", no. Extra 1 (1991), pp. 121–164. The whole issue was dedicated to *los libros de viajes en el mundo románico*.

5 Columbus undoubtedly drew on earlier travel accounts. A copy of Marco Polo's book with Columbus' notes has survived.

6 See e.g. the works: E. Popeanga Chelaru, *Lectura e investigación de los libros de viajes medievales*, "Revista de Filología Románica", N° Extra 1 (1991), pp. 9–26; A. Crivat-Vasile, *Los libros de viajes de la Edad Media española*, Bucarest 2003; D. Rodríguez Blanco, *Viajes y viajeros medievales*, in: *A 500 Años de la primera vuelta al mundo: una mirada histórica a la expedición Magallanes-Elcano*, coords. E.J. Luque Azcona, J. Miranda Bonilla, Colección Textos Institucionales, no. 99, Sevilla 2022, pp. 53–77.

7 A comprehensive analysis of this issue, i.e. in the context of the entire Latin civilisation (as conceived by Feliks Koneczny) would require broader studies, as it is too vast a topic to be adequately addressed here; besides, it has been explored in depth in general historiography.

Asian terra incognita

Medieval Europeans obtained some knowledge about Asia from ancient writers, although it was by no means systematic; for example, the great geographical works by Herodotus and Claudius Ptolemy were virtually unknown to medieval Europeans until the 15th century.⁸ Hence, pilgrimages to the Holy Land were the first sources of knowledge about Asia. The Arab expansion of the 7th and 8th centuries led to their conquest of the lands in the Mediterranean basin previously belonging to the Christian kingdoms; this reduced Europeans' possibilities of travelling to the East. In response to events in the Islamic world in the 11th century, when the Turkic peoples, more expansionist than the Arabs, were steadily gaining power, the Crusade movement was born in Western Europe. In the context of medieval Europeans' increasing knowledge of the East, the question arises whether they were interested in Asia and in knowing about this region.

Europeans believed that the Earthly Paradise was situated in the East and knew that the cradle of Christianity, Jerusalem, was also there. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that this region would evoke their interest. However, some scholars, for example the Polish historian and philosopher Mikołaj Olszewski, have analysed this issue from the perspective of the evolution of the ancient paradigm "culture-barbarism" towards the medieval concept of "(the only true) Christian religion-paganism". Europeans' belief in the central position occupied by Christianity resulted in a lack of interest in other cultures, which were perceived as lower in the hierarchy; moreover, they also saw the difference between the East and the West in economic terms.⁹

Of course, political situations also mattered: when the Mongols, a nomadic people previously unknown to the inhabitants of Europe, began to arrive at their gates, Europeans' interest in the East grew considerably. In the early 1240s, Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) decided to obtain information about the new invaders through diplomatic missions, which he entrusted to the Franciscans and Dominicans, who were, as Jean-Paul Roux put it, the "agents of the papacy" of the time.¹⁰ Soon after these first journeys, other missionaries travelled to the East; they were followed by merchants, envoys, and representatives of other professions. The Late Middle Ages

8 Almost all medieval descriptions of Asia featured various strange creatures, including headless people with faces on their chests, dog-headed people, people with snake tails instead of feet, people with only one leg, etc.; see J.B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, Harvard 1981; C. Kappler, *Monstruos, demonios y maravillas a fines de la Edad Media*, Madrid 1986; T. Todorov, *Introducción a la literatura fantástica*, México D.F. 1981.

9 See Mikołaj Olszewski's introduction to his edition of William of Rubruck, *Opis podróży*, trans. M. Olszewski, Kęty 2007, p. 18.

10 J.-P. Roux, *Les explorateurs au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1985, p. 29. The missionary work of the Franciscans and Dominicans has been analysed in a number of studies, including those by J. Richard, including *La Papauté et les Missions d'Orient au Moyen Âge (XIII^e -XV^e siècles)*, Rome 1977, and works by Raymond-Joseph Loenertz.

witnessed a rapid flourishing in travel chronicles related to Asia.¹¹ A characteristic feature of the descriptions provided by these chronicles is the *fantastic elements* in their accounts of travels; *this can be treated as a response to their readers' expectations*.¹² Interestingly, such descriptions were very popular throughout the Middle Ages. This is perfectly exemplified by *Mandeville's Travels*¹³ – today this book would probably be classified as “fantasy literature”.¹⁴

Castilian *libros de viajes*

The travel accounts of the Castilian authors have long been of interest to historians and literary scholars.¹⁵ Most of them compare *Embajada a Tamorlán*¹⁶ and the narrative of the 15th-century Castilian traveller Pero Tafur, *Andanças e viajes de Pero Tafur, por diversas partes del mundo avidos*,¹⁷ with their fourteenth-century predecessor, the *Libro del conocimiento de todos los reynos et tierras e señoríos que son por el mundo et de las señales et armas que han* (“Book of the Knowledge of All Kingdoms”), in which an anonymous author from Castile described an imaginary journey through Europe, Africa and Asia.¹⁸ If we compare *Libro del conocimiento* with the accounts of Clavijo's and Tafur's travels, we notice an obvious difference: the author of *Libro del conocimiento* never travelled through the areas he described, never visited Asia or Africa, and his descriptions reflect the cultural and geographical horizons of the representatives of the Latin civilisation at the time. The low credibility of this account is evidenced primarily by the lack of detailed dates and times and the considera-

11 The genre of a travel narrative, distinct from a novel, was born in the Arab world at the beginning of the 10th century. It developed vigorously in the works of Ibn Battuta, who, between 1325 and 1354, visited almost all the Muslim countries of the time, China, and today's Indonesia; see R.E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*, Berkeley-Los Angeles.

12 P. Zumthor, C. Peebles, *The Medieval Travel Narrative*, “New Literary History”, vol. 25, no. 4 (1994), p. 809.

13 John Mandeville was the author of a description of the Holy Land which was extremely popular in the late Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern era. Ultimately, historians of geography crossed Mandeville out of the list of travellers and explorers, as it turned out that he had skilfully plagiarised Odoric of Pordenone's descriptions of his journeys; he enriched them, embellished them, and hyped up their fantastic elements.

14 M. Serena Mazzi, *Los viajeros medievales*, “Serie Papeles del Tiempo”, no. 35 (2018), pp. 203–219.

15 See e.g. the work of V́ictora de Lama de la Cruz, *Relatos de viajes por Egipto en la ́poca de los Reyes Cat́olicos*, Madrid 2013.

16 Ruy Gonźalez de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorĺan*, ́ed. F. Lopez Estrada, Madrid 1943.

17 *Andanças e viajes de Pero Tafur, por diversas partes del mundo avidos*, ́ed. M. Jiḿenez de la Espada [1874], Barcelona 1982.

18 M.J. Lacarra, *La imaginaci3n en los primeros libros de viaje*, Actas del III Congreso de la Asociaci3n Hispánica de Literatura Medieval: (Salamanca, 3 al 6 de octubre de 1989), coord. por M.I. Toro Pascua, Vol. 1, Salamanca 1994, pp. 501–509.

ble number of fantastic elements. This was a response to the trends of the time, as mentioned before, and very well described by Ángel Pérez Priego, who argued that a certain correlation can be found in travel literature: the more fantastic creatures in it and the more imaginary the account, the lower the probability of the journey actually having taken place.¹⁹

A major change came with the advent of the 15th century and European monarchs' increased interest in Asia, dictated by political reasons: they needed strategic and tactical information to adequately react to the situation in Central Asia. In the second half of the 14th century, large areas of this region were conquered by Timur, who – following the tradition of his great Mongol predecessors – created a vast empire stretching from the steppes of Central Asia to the Mediterranean Basin. This prominent albeit cruel ruler opened a new chapter in relations between the *christianitas latina* and the post-Mongolian world. Timur exchanged diplomatic missions with Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, Henry IV of England, Charles VI of France, the doges of Venice and Genoa, and King Martin of Aragon. In May 1403, one of Timur's envoys was in Paris; we know the details of his stay at the French court relatively well from the surviving accounts, including the chronicle of the monk of Saint Denis.²⁰ The correspondence, originally written in Persian, reveals that Timur offered the French king a trade deal which guaranteed, subject to reciprocity, the safety of Western European merchants who came to the Mongolian state.²¹

King Henry III of Castile and León (1390–1406) was also interested in establishing diplomatic relations with Timur. When outlining the historical context, it is necessary to emphasise that the history of the Crown of Castile and León at the turn of the 15th century is divided into two distinct periods. During the first period – the end of the 14th century, which historians call *the dark period* – the Crown faced a serious crisis, while during the second, the 15th century, it underwent vigorous development, and its rulers took a keen interest in the events happening not only in Europe but also beyond. Henry III is known primarily for his desire to establish diplomatic relations with as many countries as possible, not only European ones but also those outside the ecumene, with a view to gathering information about their political, social, and economic situations.²² This substantially contributed to the Crown of Castile's colonisation of the Canary Islands in 1402.²³

19 M.Á. Pérez Priego, *Estudio literario de los libros de viajes medievales*, "Epos: Revista de filología", no. 1 (1984), p. 230.

20 *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys, contenant le règne de Charles VI, de 1380 à 1422*, publiée en latin pour la première fois et traduite par L. Bellaguet, vol. 3, Paris 1841, pp. 134–135.

21 M.M. Alexandrescu-Dersca, *La campagne de Timur en Anatolie (1402)*, Bucarest 1942, pp. 19–29, 92.

22 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.

23 Jean de Béthencourt's expedition to and conquest of the Canary Island is described in J. Braunstein, *Jean de Béthencourt, un Normand à la conquête des Canaries*, Condé-sur-Noireau 2001.

Undoubtedly, King Henry III's relations with Timur were a vital element of his foreign policy, and also from the perspective of this paper. It might be interesting to know the origins of his interest in Timur. When the Hungarian army, supported by contingents from Burgundy, France, Germany, and several other European countries, was catastrophically defeated at Nicopolis (1396), the *civitas christianita* was shocked. The Turks posed an increasing threat to Europe; Europeans no longer dreamt of reclaiming the Holy Land but wondered whether Europe would manage to defend itself against the Ottoman invasion. Hence, when Timur appeared on the horizon and defeated Sultan Bayezid at Ankara in 1402, the European rulers became interested in the political, cultural, religious, and economic situation on the frontiers of the *ecumene*.

King Henry III sent at least two diplomatic missions to Timur. We know little about the first, which took place in 1402, other than that it brought to the court in Seville both the news of Timur's capture of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid at the Battle of Ankara and Timur's gift of two Christian princesses to the ruler of Castile. The second was led by one of Henry III's courtiers, Ruy González de Clavijo.²⁴ During this mission, which lasted for three years (1403–1406), he travelled via Constantinople, Trebizond, Erzincan, Erzurum, Tabriz, Sultania, and Tehran to finally arrive in Samarkand, where the envoys met Timur before returning to Castile.²⁵ Most probably, Clavijo's main task was to prepare a report for King Henry III on Timur's military and economic situation. His second task was to draw a political panorama of the areas covering the Aegean Sea and Asia Minor, thanks to which the Castilian ruler learned of the weakening of the Byzantine Empire and the fratricidal struggles between the Genoese and the Venetians. *Embajada a Tamorlán* is an account that resembles a diary, in which almost every day of the journey is described in great detail.

Thirty years after Clavijo's return from Asia, Pero Tafur was sent on several diplomatic missions and, in 1436–1439, visited three continents. He went to Morocco, the Holy Land, Egypt, Cyprus, Theodosia (Kaffa), Constantinople, Rhodes, and Trebizond. During his stay in Sinai, he met Niccolò dei Conti, a Venetian merchant who had written accounts of his travels to Arab countries in the Middle East, India, Ceylon, and Southeast Asia. The Venetian shared his experiences of travelling to Asia with Tafur.

24 Ruy González de Clavijo is widely considered the author of the narrative, although this claim is increasingly being disputed (the participation of Clavijo in the expedition is, however, unquestioned). See F. López Estrada, *Introducción*, in: Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, ed. F. López Estrada, Madrid 1999, pp. 37–38. Although the Castilian mission to Timur was by definition a diplomatic mission, the chronicle does not provide much information on the diplomatic activity of the ambassadors. The author of the narrative focused on describing the everyday lives, customs and culture of the inhabitants of the areas they visited; religions, architectural objects, etc. The narrative contains detailed information on customs, people, clothing, food and court ceremonies, not only in Samarkand but also in other smaller courts and cities visited by the Castilians.

25 J.-P. Rubiés, *Late Medieval Ambassadors and the Practice of Cross-Cultural Encounters 1250–1450*, in: *The "Book" of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700*, ed. P. Brummett, ("Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions", ed. A.C. Gow, founding ed. H.E. Oberman, vol. 140), Leiden-Boston 2009, p. 37.

On his way back to Castile, while travelling through the regions of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, Tafur visited Italy and Central Europe. He probably wrote down his account between 1453 and 1454. Unlike the account of Clavijo's expedition, Pero Tafur's account reveals that its author was a person who took pleasure in travelling.

Both travellers, Clavijo and Tafur, wrote accounts of their journeys that broke with the tradition of "fantasy literature". Admittedly, both authors were aware of readers' expectations of miracles, which they tried to address in some of their descriptions. However, the grotesque anthropomorphic creatures that regularly appeared in previous accounts are conspicuously absent in their works, which reveal a change in the style of descriptions: a shift from fantasy to objectivity. Both accounts contain numerous descriptions of everyday life: of meals, drinks, cities, buildings, temples, and other architectural objects. Compared to their predecessors, both authors refrained from excessive fantasising.²⁶

The lack of fantastic elements, histories, and descriptions in both chronicles resulted in meagre interest in them among contemporary readers, who were much more eager to read Marco Polo's account. Clavijo and Tafur did not use the conventional, medieval set of miracles and fantasies in their accounts, and the objectivity and realism of the chronicles, which are now their greatest advantage, were their greatest drawback at the time. Their narratives provide descriptions of real life and the real lands and territories visited by the authors instead of figments of their imagination. This makes these accounts a bridge between the early medieval, fantastic travel accounts and later texts related to the discovery of the New World.²⁷

The role of *libros de viajes* in the history of the Crown of Castile and León

Clavijo and Tafur wrote their *libros de viajes* after they returned home from their missions: Clavijo did it almost immediately, while Tafur did so 15 years after his return, between 1453 and 1454. Neither account was particularly popular among readers of the time, which might be explained by several factors:

1. Timur died in 1405, and King Henry III in 1406, which, understandably, brought their potential cooperation to an end. After Timur's death, his empire was plunged into conflict over the succession, and the chaos that ensued ultimately led to its disintegration.

2. The information and descriptions provided by Pero Tafur did not fall on fertile ground, either. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 closed the eastern trade routes.

²⁶ R. Eberenz, *Ruy González de Clavijo et Pero Tafur: l'image de la ville*, "Études de lettres", vol. 3 (1992), p. 30. What is also significant is that both the author of Clavijo's travel narrative and Pero Tafur were particularly interested in describing cities. This in itself is not particularly unusual, as, for example, when Marco Polo travelled through exotic Asia, he also reported on unusual places along his route. However, there is a novelty in the Castilian accounts: their authors devoted a lot of attention to cities – interestingly, not only those they encountered in distant lands but also in Europe.

²⁷ M.Á. Pérez Priego, *Estudio literario*, pp. 230–231.

3. The fall of the Byzantine Empire and the disintegration of the Timurid Empire resulted in the loss of the potential of the Castilian *libros de viajes* to serve as guides for future expeditions to the East.

4. Both narratives exemplify the literature of understanding anthropology, which is set in opposition to phantasmagorical literature. They are characterised by a high level of objectivity and concern for representing reality in an objective manner.²⁸

5. Their authors provided almost ethnographic descriptions of the lands, cities, and regions they visited, and in doing so gave remarkable testimony on other cultures. Their accounts contain ethnological information: they report lifestyles, customs, beliefs, values, and legends.

6. In the context of the two previous points, the lack of imaginary miracles in these texts translated into a lack of interest in them on the part of potential readers, and, consequently, their late publication (in 1582 and 1874, respectively). No detailed information about the readership of these texts in the period directly after their publication is available, but compared to the works of Marco Polo and Odoric, their reach was certainly negligible.

However, despite their meagre recognition among their contemporaries, Clavijo's and Tafur's narratives occupy a prominent place in the history and culture not only of Spain but also Europe and Central Asia.

Conclusion

Many historians overlook the significance of travels undertaken in the 13th, 14th, and the first half of the 15th centuries, especially those to Asia. Although they did not exert as profound an impact on the people of Europe at the time as those undertaken to the New World in the late 15th and 16th centuries, the works of such travellers as Marco Polo and Odoric unquestionably contributed to the growing knowledge of the Asian world, particularly China. It can be reasonably assumed that Columbus and other great explorers of the 16th century were familiar with earlier travel narratives²⁹ and that the accounts of medieval travellers to Asia influenced the activities of their late-15th-century successors.³⁰

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

29 Christopher Columbus benefited greatly from geographical descriptions provided by Marco Polo in his work *De Mirabilibus Mundi* ("The Description of the World"). Polo's work was relatively well known in the Middle Ages – 119 manuscripts have survived to the present day. We know that Columbus read it during his first voyage (1492), although he became the owner of a copy in 1497/98, when one was presented to him by a Bristol merchant John Day. More on this issue in: F. Reichert, *Columbus und Marco Polo – Asien in Amerika. Zur Literaturgeschichte Der Entdeckungen*, "Zeitschrift Für Historische Forschung", Bd. 15, no. 1 (1988), pp. 1–63.

30 P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, London 2018, p. 370.

The 15th century marked the end of interest in *libros de viajes*. Paul Zumthor and Catherina Peebles justly observed that readers had become sated with this particular literary genre.³¹ Arguably, that is why Clavijo's and Tafur's travel accounts became of interest to publishers much later. It should be remembered that their missions took place on the eve of major changes on the Iberian Peninsula, where a number of far-reaching political, economic and social events of the 15th century led to the transformation of the Kingdom of Aragon and Castile into the first European state. Adding to this the discovery in 1492 of the islets of Guanahani, Cuba, and Haiti, which initiated the period of geographical discoveries leading to Spain's colonisation of vast areas and its subsequent wealth, we obtain a picture of a firmly established state. All these events and the fact that *libros de viajes* lacked the narrative elements that were desirable at the time – that is, fantastic descriptions – meant that they were of little interest to contemporary readers. Their authors did not resort to miracles, so much expected at that time, but steered towards objectivity and realism. Today this is the greatest advantage of these narratives, but in the Middle Ages it was the reason why they did not gain popularity.

An account of a journey made by Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, published in 1582, served as a building block in constructing the intended image of Philip II's Spanish empire. Tafur's account was printed in 1874 by Marcos Jiménez de la Espada. To this day, both narratives are valuable sources of knowledge about the times when they were written, and historians emphasise their role in Spanish historiography as testimonies to crucial episodes of medieval Spanish diplomacy.³² Almost a decade ago (2013), Rafael López Guzmán wrote that *Embajada a Tamorlán* and *Andanças e viajes de un hidalgo español* are of much greater value in the heritage of Spanish history, culture, and literature than Henry III's potential (and rather unrealistic) collaboration with Timur.³³

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31 P. Zumthor, C. Peebles, *The Medieval Travel Narrative*, p. 809.

32 F. López Estrada, *Libros de viajeros hispánicos medievales*, Madrid 2003, p. 66.

33 R. López Guzmán, *La embajada de Ruy González de Clavijo ante Tamerlán*, in: *La ruta de la seda: camino de caminos*, ed. A. Ruiz Gutiérrez, M.Á. Sorroche Cuerva, Granada 2013, p. 75.

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Fifteenth-century Castilian travel accounts as an example of relations between representatives of the *christianitas latina* and the Asian East

Abstract

Long before the conquest of the New World, Castilian envoys and travellers had been exploring the Middle East and Central Asia. The accounts of their journeys, known as *libros de viajes*, are a valuable source of information on the culture, ethnography, and geography of the areas they visited and a manifestation of the broad political horizons of the Castilian kings. The author of this article intends to outline the role played by these late medieval travel accounts in the history of Castile, and to discuss their impact on the interest in the Middle East and Asia among representatives of the Latin culture (*christianitas latina*). Ruy González de Clavijo's travel account is particularly valuable here – his chronicle of a journey to Samarkand is one of the few testimonies of the presence of representatives of the Latin culture in the territories conquered by Timur and at his court. This article also analyses the differences between these *libros de viajes* and earlier texts written by, among others, Franciscan and Dominican missionaries and merchants who travelled to Central and East Asia.

Keywords: *libros de viajes*, Pero Tafur, Ruy González de Clavijo, Asia, travel accounts.