

Here there be no dragons: *Maravilla* in Two Fifteenth-Century Spanish *libros de viajes*

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Abstract: Monsters, anthropomorphs, and marvels are common ingredients in medieval travel literature, and even narratives of real medieval journeys include these creatures, to the delight of the reading audience. At the beginning of the 15th century, two Castilian narratives of real journeys largely resist the impulse to marvel at monstrous beings, and instead marvel at the real world encountered in the journey itself.

Key words: travel literature, medieval, Tafur, Clavijo, marvels, monsters, anthropomorphs, wonders

Resumen: Los monstruos, seres antropomórficos y maravillas regularmente habitan la literatura de viajes medieval, como una manera de intentar explicar ese Otro ubicado muy lejos del mundo conocido. Al principios del siglo XV, dos narrativas castellanas de viajes verdaderos en su mayoría resisten la tentación incluir estos seres monstruosos; en cambio se maravillan por un mundo diferente y real que encuentran a lo largo del camino.

Palabras clave: libros de viajes, medieval, Tafur, Clavijo, maravillas, monstruos, seres antropomórficos

Early medieval literature is renowned for the marvels recounted of far-away places and fantastical events and beings: pilgrimage guides relate sacred journeys to the Holy Land, where pilgrims retrace the life of Christ and relive the miracles he performed, and travel accounts of journeys to the Orient describe grotesque anthropomorphs with feet large enough to shield their bodies from the noonday sun, dog-headed men, and *anthropophagi* (cannibals), to name but a few. For the medieval reader, in order to view curiosities and marvels, it was necessary to leave the known, the familiar, and travel to far-away, unfamiliar lands—*terra incognita*; for these wonders “appear at the limits of geographical knowledge—on the borders of the map,” (50) and provide a “model of the world normal at its center and monstrous at its margins,” (8) according to Mary Campbell. Marvels populated the medieval mindset and were not only accepted—they were an expected feature of travel narratives. One of many titles for Marco Polo’s narrative, *El libro de las maravillas*, attests to the desirability of marvels as a primary element of medieval travel accounts, which were often read more for their entertainment value than for their usefulness as guidebooks to faraway lands. Medieval travelers felt so compelled to incorporate these wonders into their accounts that marvels continued to play a role in late medieval travel narratives written prior to Columbus’s voyages to the New World, and even after 1492, well into the sixteenth century.

In order to describe a world unfamiliar to the reader and to buttress the credibility of their accounts, the authors of early medieval travel narratives followed writing conventions that required the traveler to view the unknown through the lens of conventional *auctoritas*, whether Biblical or Classical. In addition to the Bible, St. Isidore’s *Etymologiae* and the works of Pliny, Solinus and Aristotle¹ provided

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¹ For an overview of classical sources for marvel material, see Anca Crivat-Vasile, “*Mirabilis Oriens*: fuentes y transmisión.”

source material for marvels which included anything from the fantastical creatures of medieval bestiaries, the magical qualities of gems described in lapidaries, miracles of the Holy Land recounted in the Bible, the location of the biblical Earthly Paradise and the tribes of Gog and Magog.

Initially, the Crusades and later the Mongol threat from the east of the early thirteenth century drove an increased demand for information about the Orient. In what J.K. Hyde describes as “an opening up of the world second only to that of the early sixteenth century” (172), a number of missionary expeditions in the thirteenth century were undertaken in response to the demand for information about this menace from the east. The narratives that recount these endeavors, such as the missionary expeditions found in William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium* and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* demonstrate a concern to accurately describe Mongol customs and beliefs. The accounts of Rubruck and Carpine, like that of their secular contemporary, Marco Polo, show significant innovations when compared to earlier medieval travel accounts, in particular with regard to the descriptions of the peoples and customs of the societies observed by these authors, to such an extent that “[w]estern ethnography was aroused from its semi-dormant state and emerge for a time as an autonomous, objective and even scientific state” (Hyde 172). In addition to conveying traditional, authoritative “truths,” these thirteenth-century authors show a growing emphasis on the value of private experience and the authority of the eye-witness report. Nevertheless, thirteenth and fourteenth-century travellers continue to incorporate many fantastic locations and people in their narratives, perhaps as a nod to the expectations of their reading audience.² The *Travels* of Marco Polo provides a clear example of the mixture of the fantastic with the real, in the juxtaposition of first-person observations about the people and customs of Asia with descriptions of fantastic creatures like the unicorn.

With the advent of the fifteenth century, a further development in the treatment of marvel material can be observed in the presentation of *mirabilia* or marvels in travel narratives. Two Castilian *libros de viajes* from the first half of the fifteenth century, Ruy González de Clavijo’s *Embajada a Tamorlán* (1403-1406) and Pero Tafur’s *Andanças e viajes de un hidalgo español* (1436-1439), incorporate marvels or *maravilla* in a way that differentiates them from their travel predecessors. Clavijo and Tafur grapple with a complex problem of presentation: how to convey verbally the truth of their foreign experience and, at the same time, how to meet their audience’s ‘horizon of expectations’ (Jauss 22-25), expectations often met until then by the frequent inclusion of marvel material. However, the grotesque anthropomorphic creatures that regularly populate medieval travel reports prior to the fifteenth-century are notably absent from these two Castilian travel narratives. This dearth of conventional, exotic marvels in the fifteenth-century Castilian travel narratives means that expressions of *maravilla* by the author and the descriptions of curiosities are largely vested in the authority of the eye-witness author. In short, these two Castilian travel narratives demonstrate a change in focus away from what Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego describes as “*lo maravilloso fantástico*” to “*lo maravilloso real*” (230-31). In other words, there is a conscious rejection of the indiscriminate acceptance of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic fantasies of Classical *auctoritas* in favor of the accurate description of real marvels and wonders that impress because of their surpassing uniqueness.

² J.K. Hyde describes chapter V of Carpine’s *Ystoria Mongalorum* as “the weakest in the book, presumably because Giovanni did not trouble to seek out the more reliable sources that other Western reporters found. It was into this chapter that Carpine inserted his account of the monstrous races and other wonders deeply entrenched in Eastern and Western traditions alike” (77).

Clavijo's Embajada a Tamorlán and Tafur's Andanças describe real journeys, to the Samarkand court of the Mongol Emperor Timur in the case of the Embajada, and around the Mediterranean and Black Seas and parts of northern Europe in the Andanças. Both narratives have received attention for the modern quality of their narratives, due mainly to the efforts of their authors to relate only what they have personally seen and witnessed. Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego characterizes Clavijo and Tafur as pragmatic and realistic ("Maravillas" 69) and Francisco López Estrada describes the Castilian travelers as impartial witnesses ("Viajeros" 240). A number of studies have examined the marvel material in these two Castilian travel accounts, in the context of medieval travel literature more generally (Pérez Priego 1995; Lacarra 1994); and more specifically within the context of medieval Spanish travel narratives, both fictional and real (Béguelin-Argimón 2010). Anca Crivat-Vasile has offered a useful study on the Classical origins of marvel material in travel literature, while César Domínguez explores the three rhetorical modes common to the writing about mirabilia and the marvelous in travel literature: descriptio, narratio and evidentia. In a study that contains an examination of the marvel material in Embajada and the Andanzas as well as a fictional fifteenth-century travel account, Historia del Infante Don Pero de Portugal, Victoria Béguelin-Argimón identifies four categories of marvels found in fifteenth-century Castilian travel narratives: religious marvels, such as the legend of St. Thomas; material or man-made marvels, including architectural wonders; anthropological marvels, and folkloric or mythic marvels (Amazons or the location of the Earthly Paradise).

It is worthwhile to spend a moment to examine the Castilian predecessor to the fifteenth-century *libros de viajes*, the late fourteenth-century Spanish Libro de conocimiento. The Libro de conocimiento heraldically traces an imaginary journey through Europe, Africa and Asia by an anonymous Iberian author. While the Libro has characteristics in common with its fellow Castilian travel narratives, like the first-person narrator and the frequent use of verbs of arriving and departing, it lacks the meticulous notation of time and dates of the Embajada, and includes many more elements of *lo maravilloso fantástico* in the descriptions of cynocephali (dog-headed men), whom the author claims to have personally observed in a city of Tartary ("Et yo vi uno dellos en la çidad de Norgançio" (82)), as well as giant ants that are "grandes como gatos" (52) and store gold in their anthills, and the marvels of the Eternal Isle, where the trees produce birds instead of fruit. The presence of fantastical beings in the Libro in much greater number than its Castilian successors is typical of imaginary journeys, according to Pérez Priego (230), and for this reason will not be directly compared to the genuine travels described in the Embajada and the Andanças.

In contrast, the fifteenth-century Castilian travellers, Ruy González de Clavijo and Pero Tafur, contain almost none of the extraordinary marvels and fabulous legends of earlier medieval travel texts, and point to a shift away from the automatic inclusion of the monstrous creatures of Classical authority. These two Castilian authors provide an overall consistent vision of *lo maravilloso real*—marvels that are in the majority personally witnessed by the author-traveler, marvels that include wonderful man-made constructions, opulent objects or natural wonders that impress for their unusual or striking appearance rather than for any fantastical qualities, and are described in careful detail. These are men who marvel at what they observe, narrators who, eyes wide open, obey a desire to recount that which appears before them, not cite traditional authority.

The Embajada a Tamorlán

The Embajada a Tamorlán relates the journey of a Castilian embassy sent by Enrique III to the court of the Mongol ruler Timur (Tamerlane) in Samarkand,

in what is present-day Uzbekistan. The purported author is the leader of the expedition, Ruy González de Clavijo, a Madrid nobleman and chamberlain to King Enrique III.³ Clavijo's narrative details the trials and tribulations of the Castilians during their three-year journey by sea from Castile to Trebisond and overland from the eastern shores of the Black Sea to Samarkand. The ambassadorial mission, officially sanctioned and royally sponsored, is a group endeavor with a single goal: to meet with the emperor Timur. Clavijo's account of the delegation's expedition provides a remarkable description of Timur's court that even today is a key source for historians writing about this great Mongol ruler.

Francisco López Estrada identifies several qualities that make the Embajada a credible travel narrative: the regular notation of the time of day in which events occur, the adherence to a strict chronology in the narration of events, the attempt to describe objects and distances using precise measurements (measuring in fingers, palms, bow-shots, leagues and miles); and the use of foreign vocabulary to apprehend the unknown—all work together to help construct a convincing account that López Estrada characterizes as containing “una modernidad sustancial” (“Viajeros españoles” 232-33). An exceptional characteristic of the Embajada a Tamorlán is the almost total lack of traditional marvels or *maravillas*—especially anthropomorphs—in the text. The ambassadors marvel over the numerous holy relics they view in the churches of Constantinople, the remarkable court of Emperor Timur in Samarkand; the opulence of Timur's tents and the architecture to be admired in his capital city; and the magnificent jewels he and his wives wear. There are excellent descriptions of real animals, such as giraffes and elephants, but these literary depictions are notable for their accurate realism, not for any fantastical attributions as those found in earlier travel narratives, like the Libro de conocimiento's cat-sized ants. In particular, Clavijo's meticulous description of a giraffe observed in the city of Huy [Khoy] (a gift for the Emperor Timur from the Sultan of Babilonia), often cited in previous studies,⁴ merits repeating here in its entirety for the precision offered in the descriptive art:

La cual animalia era fecha d'esta guisa: avía el cuerpo tan grande como un cavallo, e el pescueço, muy luengo; e los braços, mucho más altos que las piernas; e el pie avía así como el bue, e fendido; e desde la uña del braço encima del espalda, avía fasta diez e seis palmos; e desde las agujas fasta la cabeça, avía fasta otros dies e seis palmos. E quando quería enfestar el pescueço, alçávalo tanto e tan alto, que era *maravilla*. E el pescueço avía delgado, como ciervo; a las piernas avía muy cortas segund la longura de los braços. E omne que lo oviese visto, bien pensaría que estava asentada. E las ancas avía derrocadas ayuso, como búfano; e la barriga, blanca; e el cuerpo, de color dorado e rodado de uns ruedas blancas e grandes. E el rostro avía como de ciervo; e en lo baxo de faza las narizes e en la fuente, avía un cerro alto, agudo; e los ojos, muy grandes e redondos; e las orejas, como de cavallo; e derca d'las orejas tenía dos cornezuelos pequeños, redondos, e lo más d'ellos, cubiertos de pelo, que parecía a los del ciervo quando le nascen. E tan alto avía el pescueço e tanto lo estendía quanto

³ Regarding the authorship of the Embajada, see Patricia Mason, “The *Embajada*,” and López Estrada's introduction to the 1999 edition of the Embajada, pp. 36-40.

⁴ See López Estrada, “Viajeros españoles en Asia,” p. 243.

lo quería, que encima de unas paredes que oviese cinco o seis tapias en alto, podría bien alcançar a comer; e otrosí, encima de un árbol tan alto alcançava a comer las fojas d'él, que las comía mucho. Así que omne nunca la oviese visto *le parexía cosa maravillosa de ver.* (197-98, my italics)

Here, Clavijo selects the sharpest instruments from of his rhetorical toolbox to translate this unfamiliar, exotic animal for his reading audience: the first of these tools is the simile. Similes and metaphors have been identified by travel scholars as essential for the travel writer to bridge the chasm of understanding between the known and the unknown, because “comparison, which is part of the fabric of the world in which things are recounted, enables one to see how things are,” and because “its aim is to instill belief in the addressee” (Hartog 230). Clavijo’s description of the giraffe piles on the comparisons to animals familiar to his readers: ‘a body like that of a horse;’ ‘the foot like an ox’s;’ ‘a long neck like a deer;’ ‘haunches that slope downwards like those of buffalo;’ ‘a face like that of a deer;’ ‘ears like a horse’s;’ ‘small, round horns. . . that look like a those of a newborn deer.’ To this rapid accumulation of similes, he adds precise measurements that inspire trust in the author while simultaneously allowing the reader to accurately apprehend the astonishing height of this strange creature: ‘from the hoof to the shoulder, sixteen hands;’ ‘from the withers to the head, another sixteen hands;’ with the neck so long ‘that it could extend [it] as high as five or six times the height of a wall.’ An exceptional description finished off with a final expression of wonder: ‘so that for anyone who had never seen one, it would seem a marvelous thing to see.’ This extensive description of a real but awe-inspiring animal, expressed with an almost poetic accuracy effectively replaces the imaginary griffins, unicorns, and phoenixes commonly found in earlier medieval travel narratives.

As there always must an exception to the rule, so there can be found two examples of traditional marvels in the Embajada. The first instance is a description of the Amazons, a tribe of women that purportedly resides in more distant lands to the east of Tamerlane’s empire, but whom Clavijo does not personally encounter:

Onze jornadas d’esta ciudat de Samaricante, fazia la tierra del Catay, a una tierra onde fueron las amazonas; e oy en día mantienen la costumbre de no tener omne consigo, salvo cuando viene su tiempo del año, que les dan licencia las mayores d’ellas, e toman sus fijas consigo e vanse a las tierras e lugares más cercanos. E cuando los omnes las ven, convídanlas, e ellas vanse con aquel omne que más quieren; e comen e beven con ellos, e estánse así un tiempo con ellos comiendo e beviendo, e después tórnanse para sus tierras. E si paren fijas, tiénenlas consigo; e si paren fijos, envíanlos a los lugares onde son sus padres. (317)

The inclusion of this brief description of the Amazons follows a long tradition dating back to Histories of Herodotus and repeated in Castilian works such as Alfonso X *el Sabio*’s thirteenth-century General Historia. The Amazons of Cathay is one of few instances in the Embajada when Clavijo does not preface a legend with “dizen que,” which he generally uses either to distance himself from the reported speech of others or to clearly indicate when he has not personally witnessed the people or events described. Francisco López Estrada suggests one possible reason for the presence of the Amazon material in the Embajada is that a local

informant related to Clavijo the existence of a real matriarchal society or tribe that lived to the east of Timur's domains (1999; see p. 17, fn. 44). Or, the Amazons may be included in the Embajada as a rhetorical device by Clavijo to bolster the veracity of his own personal account: for Clavijo to be able to convey to his audience the reliability of his narrative—no matter how extraordinary the court of Timur, how spectacular the riches displayed there, how outlandish the customs—this is a known world: identifiable, describable, apprehendable. However, beyond the eastern limits of Timur's territory lies *terra incognita*. While the legend of Amazon women is a standard filler for travel narratives, their presence in the Embajada is exceptional, in the sense that Clavijo recounts no other legends from Classical authors that he has not personally seen and verified, other than to remark locations along the route to Samarkand that correspond to sites whose names resonate for him from Classical literature.

The one other inclusion of traditional marvel material in the Embajada is related to a religious marvel: the presence of St. Thomas in India. This legend, like the Amazons, takes place beyond the borders of Timur's realm in lands the Castilians do not visit, and this time Clavijo clearly marks this legend as the product of a secondhand informant:

En esta tierra de la India ay una isla en do está el cuerpo de Santo Tomé, e ante la dicha isla pasa un río, et *dizen que* en la iglesia de santo Tomé cessa aquel río, que no corre. E passa muncha gent a velar aquella noche [the night of the feast day of St. Thomas]. *Dizen que* el cuerpo de santo Tomé está enfiesto, éntrego, e que tiene un braço alto, e que aquel día de su fiesta, que echa mano de un omne e que lo tiene fuerte, e que se le no puede ir e que lo tiene así un año fasta otro día de su fiesta, que dexa aquel e toma a otro, e aquel sotiérranlo. Lo cual fue preguntado a unos mercaderos de la dicha India que en Samaricante estaban, si era verdad esto de santo Tomé, e ellos respondieron que eran moros, e que no lo avían visto, mas que *lo avían oído dezir* muchas vezes. (288, my italics)

The description of St. Thomas's shrine has parallels with many of the fantastical places described in the East, especially its location on a difficult-to-access island where magical events occur, such as the halting of the river's flow at the church of St. Thomas. On one hand, Clavijo distances himself from this report through the repetition of "*dizen que*," to underscore the secondhand nature of the report. At the same time, he is unable to confirm the veracity of the tale through the confirmation by reliable eyewitnesses: when he questions Muslim merchants visiting Samarkand about the story, they cannot personally corroborate the tale, even though they, 'have heard it said many times.' According to López Estrada (1999, p. 288, fn. 401), this passage is found in only one manuscript of the Embajada, and he speculates that its absence from the other Embajada manuscripts is due either to the unreliability of non-Christian informants or the relationship of the story of St. Thomas with its source, one of the books of the Apocrypha.

Other than the brief mention of Amazons and the story of St. Thomas, traditional wonders and marvels are notably absent from the Embajada. Clavijo's narrative adheres exclusively to the events and places that he or other members of the Castilian embassy personally witness, and he avoids inserting descriptions of fantastical anthropomorphs and zoomorphs that delighted medieval audiences. In the majority, *maravilla* takes on an adjectival or verbal form when marveling over the manmade edifices of Tamerlane's empire and the customs of its

population. Certain expressions are frequently found in Clavijo's descriptions of the objects, buildings or people that amaze, including the frequent use of the adjective or verb "maravilla," and expressions of *brevitas* such as "this would be too long to tell here," or the inexpressibility *topos*, where the author laments a lack of appropriate vocabulary to properly describe what he sees. Typical of this type of marveling at architectural wonders in the Embajada is the incredulity expressed over the rapid construction of the mosque in Samarkand: "E aquella capilla fue fecha e acabada en los diez días, que es una *maravilla* tan grand obra como aquella acabarse en diez días" (304, my italics), or the comment on the palaces in the city of Kesh, which also contains an expression of *brevitas*: "E allí les mostraron tantas cámaras e apartamientos *que sería luengo de contar*, en los cuales avía oro e azul e de otros mucho colores, fechos a muchas *maravillas*" (248, my italics), and finally, in the same city of Kesh, a description with the inexpressibility *topos*: "E tanta e tan rica era la obra d'estos palacios, *que se no podría bien escribir*, si se no andudiese a mirase de espacio" (248, my italics).

Pero Tafur's Andanças

In contrast to the clearly stated explanation for recording the embassy's experiences in the prologue of the Embajada a Tamorlán, to leave a precise accounting of the lands visited and observed, the purpose underlying Pero Tafur's writing of his travel memoirs, the Andanças e viajes de un hidalgo español, fifteen years after his return to Castile, remains unclear. Tafur travels under his own auspices, unsponsored, and his three-year trip from 1436 to 1439 appears to have no single destination. Critics have emphasized his mercantile inclinations (Labarge 240-42), while others have described him as a precursor to the modern tourist (Fitzmaurice-Kelly 98). Franco Meragalli credits the fall of Constantinople and a certain nostalgia for his youthful travel experiences as Tafur's motivation for recounting them so many years after they took place ("Las memorias" 300). Tafur's itinerary stays within the confines of the world then familiar to Europeans of the time: he travels from the Iberian Peninsula to Italy and Constantinople, he makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and serves briefly as ambassador for the King of Cypress to the court of the Sultan of Egypt. In the latter part of his journey, Tafur travels over the Alps to northern Europe, where he is presented to the Holy Roman Emperor Albert II, at his court in Burgundy.

Unlike the objective perspective, formal tone and neutral authority provided primarily by the use of the third person narrator in the Embajada, Pero Tafur is the first person narrator of his own, subjective experiences. The Embajada provides an official report of an international experience concerning relations between governments and rulers, while the Andanças is more closely concerned with private experience as a general example to be absorbed and possibly emulated by other individuals. As a result, Tafur's personality is strongly evident throughout the narrative, as is his often ironic tone, and when confronted with objects that earlier medieval narratives would clearly be considered wondrous, Tafur frequently demonstrates a healthy dose of skepticism about marvels that appear false to his shrewd observer's eye.

When in Constantinople, Tafur, like Clavijo, greatly admires the vast number of sacred relics from the Holy Land. Tafur does not question the relics' authenticity when visiting the Byzantine capital, yet he demonstrates a healthy dose of skepticism when he is shown an identical relic later in his travels, in the city of Nuremberg:

Aquí está una yglesia donde el emperador Carlo Magno puso las reliquias que traxo de Ultramar, quando ganó a Ierusalem; é fuí allí con los Cardenales á ver aquellas reliquias, é mostráronnos

muchas, entre las quales nos mostraron un lança de fierro tan
lengua como un cobdo, é dezían que aquella era la que avía entrado
en el costado de Nuestro Señor; é yo dixé como la avía visto en
Constantinopla, é creo, que si los señores allí non estuvieran, que me
viera en peligro con los alemanes por aquello que dixé. (269-70)

Tafur rashly voices his doubts about the Nuremburg relic's bona fides, and narrowly avoids a falling-out with his hosts for voicing his opinion. This is not to say that Tafur does not relate legends or an occasional fantastical story in his narrative; however, when he incorporates such a tale—a rare event—it is usually inserted into the *Andanças* via the testimony of others, and Tafur is careful to state whether or not he personally witnessed the event described.

Such is the case with the travelling companion that Tafur encounters when returning from St. Catherine's monastery of Mt. Sinai to Cairo, Egypt. Tafur's acquaintance, the Italian Niccolo de' Conti, is returning from an extended sojourn in India, and during the fifteen days they travel together, Conti regails Tafur with tales from his life in the East, including his forced conversion to Islam. Here, the typical marvel material comes to life, but always in the form of Conti's testimony. Tafur peppers Conti's narrative with "dizen que" and "dize que" to emphasize the secondhand source of the legends recounted, which include the miracles of Saint Thomas, fruit the size of large pumpkins that contain three individual fruits inside—each of a different flavor, and crabs that on a certain coastline turn to stone when exposed to the air upon exiting the ocean. There is a curious juxtaposition of fantasy and truth in Conti's narration: Conti claims to have seen unicorns as well as elephants; he states that he personally met the legendary Christian ruler, Prester John, who introduced Conti to his wife, and he describes the practice of suttee—young widows in India who throw themselves on the funeral pyre of their departed husband.

Even so, when Tafur asks the Italian if he has seen the Classical anthropomorphs common to medieval travel literature, Conti replies in the negative:

Preguntéle si havía visto cosas monstruosas en la forma humana,
ansí como algunos quieren dezir hombre de un pié ó de un ojo ó
tan pequeños como un cobdo ó tan altos como una lança; dize que
non sintió nada de todas esas cosas, pero que bestias vido de
estrañas figuras. . . (106)

The insertion of Conti's tales of the East fulfills the purpose of recounting *maravillas* typical of earlier medieval travel narratives, with the exception here that Tafur is careful to maintain the distinction between his own experiences and those recounted to him by another. One can easily imagine the boredom of a desert passage being alleviated by the entertaining marvels that Conti relates during their fifteen days together, however, these tales are the exception rather than the rule in the *Andanças*. In no other instance do the marvels of early medieval travelogues appear in Tafur's narrative, and indeed, Tafur shows himself in all other moments to be a keen observer of human nature and city life in Europe and the Near East.

Tafur is generally highly regarded as an accurate observer of the peoples and cities he visits. Like Clavijo, the vast majority of religious or architectural marvels that Tafur describes belong to the category identified by Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego as *lo maravilloso real*, not *lo maravilloso fantástico*, and are characterized by the same use of the adjectival and verbal forms of

“maravilla,” expressions of *brevitas*, and use of the inexpressibility *topos*, as can be seen in his descriptions of Rome. There, he marvels at Roman monuments and churches in general: “En Roma estuve toda la quaresma visitando los santuarios é obras é edificios antiguos, á nuestro paresçer *maravillosamente* fechos, los quales *yo dubdo no solamente poderlos escribir*, mas aún aver mirado, entiendo, como se devía; *é si yo*, segunt la magnificençia é grandeza de la cosa *en algo menguare, sea perdonado, porque yo non soy bastante á tan gran fecho*” (21-22, my italics); and more particularly, the Colliseum: “É allí çerca está el Coliseo, que fué, segunt dizen, el mayor é el mejor é más rico edificio que en el mundo fué fecho, é bien paresçe, aunque por la mayor parte está desfecho, su grandeza é *maravillosa* fábrica. É *serié largo de dezir* cómo los romanos tienén este Colieseio, é con quanta reverençia. . .” (31, my italics); and the city of Rome itself: “É cosas muchas, é santuarios, é indulgençias plenarias, é *maravillosos* edificios, *que serié largo de dezir*, en esta çibdat están” (34, my italics). In other locations, Tafur demonstrates an appreciation for natural curiosities, such as the separation of salinated and sweet water at the confluence of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River: “El moro que me levava me dixo una grant *maravilla* que el río Jordan entra por el piélagó é sale de la otra parte sin se mezclar con la otra agua, é dize que en medio del piélagó pueden beber agua duçe [sic] del río” (60, my italics).

Conclusion

Both the Embajada and the Andanças have long interested historians for their accurate reportage and descriptions: the Embajada remains a primary text for Mongol historians interested in Timur’s rule, and the Andanças provides the last description by a European of Constantinople prior to its fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Due to the scarce bibliographical information for both narratives, it is difficult to determine how widely the texts were diffused. For Clavijo, two other events also play into the fact that his narrative will have no long-lasting influence, either politically or literarily: the deaths of the Mongol Emperor Timur in 1405, quickly followed by that of King Enrique III of Castile, in 1406. The latter is succeeded by his infant son, while the former’s kingdom is quickly immersed in a series of familial conflicts over the succession to the throne that essentially bring about the dissolution of the Mongol empire. These royal deaths combine to erase the necessity or even the possibility of any future contacts or alliances between Castile and the East. The closing of the Eastern trade routes from 1453 means that the fifteenth-century Castilian *libros de viajes* lose any worth as guides to or instigators for future travel expeditions to the East, and the lack of imaginary wonders in these texts translates to a disinterest on the part of a reading audience that continues to give preference to Marco Polo’s exotic Travels over more factual representations.

Some of the characteristics of the fifteenth-century Castilian travel narratives illustrate that travel discourse continues to grow and change from Marco Polo’s thirteenth-century narrative to the early fifteenth century. While the examples of the Amazons and the St. Thomas legend in the Embajada and Conti’s wonders of the East quoted in the Andanças point to conventional medieval marvel material, it must be remembered that these citations are the exceptions rather than the rule, and that traditional marvels in the form of anthropomorphs and zoomorphs are entirely absent from both narratives. The wonder that Clavijo and Tafur express in their narratives, their marveling at genuinely beautiful or remarkable objects, and the descriptions they provide of real-life marvels, rather than marvels of the imagination, mark their texts as a bridge between early medieval travel works that depend on received authority and the later, New World texts that vest authority in the eye-witness author and his ability to accurately describe what he sees for his reading audience.

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