
This volume is the proceedings of a conference held on 24-26 of November of 1999 by the Departament de Filologia Espanyola of the University of Valencia entitled Jornadas sobre Literatura de Viajes en el Mundo Románico. It contains twenty two articles by mostly Peninsular scholars on texts about pilgrimages, crusades, conquests, explorations, merchant expeditions, and descriptions of marvels, uniting all these under the rubric of literatura de viajes. The book is divided into five sections: “Mares, sueños, vuelos y paraísos,” “El viaje a Jerusalén y a los lugares sagrados: Cruzada y peregrinación,” “Libros de maravillas,” “Espacios narrativos,” and “Una mirada, hoy.”

One cluster of articles focuses on the classical heritage of medieval travel literature. Alan Deyermond examines Dante’s use of classical travel tropes in the Comedia. Isabel Soler describes the tension between utopía teológica (102), classical and medieval descriptions of the known world, and vivencia racionalista (102), empirical information brought to light by navigators working at the dawn of modernity. Antonia Martínez Pérez takes up the problem of the motif of the flying horse presented in Cleomadés and later in the Quijote. Eugenia Popeanga reviews the primarily Latin literature of medieval travelers in search of earthly paradise, and Rubén Montañés provides an inventory of works of Byzantine travel literature.

Another cluster discusses the discursive conventions and variations of different types of medieval travel literature. Rubio Tovar offers an insightful discussion of how Dante’s trip to Paradise affects the structure of the Comedia, paying special attention to the philosphical and theological problems posed by the “reality” of visiting heaven, and how this problem leads Dante to “explorar las posibilidades mismas de la escritura” (96). César Domínguez brings recent critical theory to bear on over a dozen works of medieval travel literature. Drawing on theorists such as Kristeva, Jameson and Chatman, Domínguez situates the relato de viajes before the related, but discursively and ideologically distinct crónica de cruzada. Francisco López Estrada argues the influence of Llull’s novelistic journey in such works as the Llibre del gentil on Don Pedro González de Uceda’s poem 342 from the Cancionero de Baena, and Estela Pérez Bosch explains how printed editions of Mandeville’s Libro de maravillas is commodified by the emerging knowledge market of the 17th century.

A number of authors focus on how the discursive conventions of one recognized genre are employed by writers of travel literature. Emilio José Sales Dasí presents a reading of the Crónica de Adramón as a relato de viaje caballeresco. Nieves Baranda examines the connection between the contemplative gaze and the extensive description of holy places in their historical context in Los misterios de Jerusalem by El Cruzado. José Manuel Herrero Massari describes how creeping empiricism separates the libro de maravilla and the relato de viaje, pushing the former toward fantastic fiction and latter toward modern geography and adventure novel.

The treatment of the Other is the subject of three of the volume’s articles. Ana Benito contributes an article on the changing representation of the Amazon warrior. She explains how classical values are adapted by medieval authors who map the generic

conventions of the sentimental romance onto the Amazon myth. Then, 16th and 17th-century authors use the Amazon myth as a resource for resolving Greenblatt’s “crisis of representation” in descriptions of the new world. In a study of Pero Tafur’s Andanças, Karen Daly explains that descriptions of virtuous male protagonists are couched in the rhetoric of classical biography, while female characters are characterized as libertine scandal mongers, symbols of their (foreign) nation’s moral decrepitude.

Maravillas provides a useful overview of travel literature of various stripe written during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The articles complement each other well and represent a range of critical approaches, from traditional philology and codicology (V. Beltrán) to more theoretically informed criticism (Domínguez). Many of the articles present rich bibliographies on the subject of medieval travel literature, and the book will be a very useful resource for research on this topic. Some articles, particularly those dealing with the representation of women and the Other (Daly, Benito) might have benefitted from recourse to relevant critical theory. A few of the articles (Alonso Asenjo, Casas Rigall, Carmona, Carrizo Rueda) presented a great deal of impeccably researched and documented material but lacked cohesive and engaging arguments. These are balanced by others (Soler, Domínguez, Benito) who offer cogent, interesting, and convincing arguments. Overall, the volume will be very useful to anyone working in the field of travel literature, and is particularly successful in bringing together articles that examine the discursive character of, and question the boundaries and definitions of medieval Romance travel literature.

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