

PEDRO TAFUR, A CASTILIAN NOBLEMAN IN HOLY LAND AND EGYPT

Ángel Luis Molina Molina

Universidad de Murcia
almolina@um.es

Tafur appears in his book as the prototype of ideal Christian Castilian knight in fight against Islam; lover of his honor above self-interest, achiever of his religious duties, charitable and gracious with poor people; behavior not incompatible with courtier behavior looking for the power of the lords; knower of the world; sybarite man; emerging humanist, brave traveler and curious.

As traveler he looks practical, *traveler's checks* or bills of *exchange*, cashed in Genoa, Florence, Venice, Bruges and Antwerp, are provided for travelling around the world. He must be supplied with money for such a long trip (almost three years); and travelled accompanied with two squires. Horseback riding accustomed he did not feel comfortable travelling by horse cart, and the balancing of the ships was not very familiar for him. Probably he was strong, he was not afraid to stay during three months, the hottest, in Egypt.

His curiosity is great for looking and hearing new things. In Dead Sea he is apart of the pilgrims group to go to Transjordan; in Jerusalem he costumes as Moorish to see the Salomon's Temple, converted into a mosque; in Sinai river, against monks and Nicola de Conti opinion, he try cross to India, the fabulous land of Prester Juan, finally, Venetian adventurers reasons make him abandon.

The great trip idea did not only come of Holy Land pilgrimage wish, he heard in Juan II court the narration of the embassy to Great Tamerlane, narrated by Ruy González de Clavijo during the kingdom of Enrique III. Another interesting incentive for him, may be an excessive desire, was the chance to contact personally with princes and kings of new countries.

We could say Pedro Tafur is not and typical historian reflecting about the veracity of historical events or their details accuracy consulting sources, he narrates the events as he saw or as they are narrated in lord meeting, with the inconvenience of narrate them far away in time and space. For these reasons its most serious mistakes are related with the events date and the places distance.

During his journey to East, only Holy Land and Egypt trip (since May to October 1437) is considered. They left from Venice on Ascension Day (1437 May 9th), after

God's blessing, during mass celebration, in the gallery of the pilgrimage called Holy Sepulchre.

They sail on Adriatic Sea to Corfu, stop in Crete and Rhodes and from there arrive in Jaffa, Jerusalem port. Tafur's visit had a duration of three weeks, he visited most legendary and historical places in Jerusalem and outskirts: Mount Sion, Dead Sea, the Orchard of Gethsemane, Mount Calvary, Mount Tabor, the Holy Sepulchre, Salomon's Temple, Bethlehem, Magdala, Jericho, Bethany (place in Jordan river where Jesus Christ was baptized), amongst others; after his stay in Holy Land he goes to Egypt, stopping in Cyprus, where the king of Cyprus commissioned a reception with the Sultan of Cairo; in Egypt he stays until October visiting the outskirts of Cairo city, Sinai river and another places related with Israel people presence in Egypt and his subsequent return to the promised land. In Sinai meets Nicolo Conti, a Venetian adventurer. Finally, he visits Alexandria and comes back to Cyprus.

He is the only protagonist of the trip narrative; we know he was accompanied by two squires; however, they are never called in the text. He always behaves as a nobleman and he likes narrating his relationship with the highest authorities (kings, noblemen, cardinals, etc.), of the visited places and his preferential treatment, is separated of the rest of pilgrims and accommodated, together with another noblemen, by the monks of Mount Sion, is received with honors by the king of Cyprus, who orders a reception with the Sultan of Cairo, at the same time he supplies him ships for travelling to Egypt; the most important Sultan's assistant accommodate him in his house during his stay in Cairo city and he is treated as a son, amongst others preferential; he also likes being the protagonist in ceremonies that enhances his personal values: in Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem converted two German and a French men in knight and they left their weapons hanging there as was the habit amongst noblemen in this kind of ceremonies.