

# Presentation

## THE GLOBE AND MANKIND. IDENTITIES AND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH TIME

The “Wise” kings, so did the Castilian and Portuguese sovereigns consider themselves. The cultural opus of Alfonso X The Wise covers all fields of knowledge: law and the philosophy of law, history, the sciences, games and even, following the example of Solomon to whom the *Cantar de los Cantares*, the long poem from the *Cantigas de Santa María*, is attributed, but to whom we also owe works in his role as patron, as in both the Cathedral of León and the many translations that emerged from his presses, added to those elaborated in Toledo for over a century. [...] To facilitate the diffusion of knowledge, Castilian was adopted in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century as the official language for acts issued by the Royal Chancellery and scientific, juridical and historical works [...] Thus, culture was rapidly incorporated into the arsenal of the instruments of power by the kings of the western peninsula.

—Adeline Rucquoi, *La historia medieval de la Península Ibérica*

To speak of the other is to postulate it as different, to postulate the existence of two terms, *a* and *b*, and that *a* is not *b*; that is, there are Greeks and non-Greeks. But the difference only becomes interesting at the moment in which *a* and *b* enter the same system; until then, there exists only non-coincidence, pure and simple. But from that point on there are divergences and, hence, an assignable or significant difference between the two terms. Now there are Greeks and barbarians. Once expressed or transcribed, difference becomes meaningful; trapped between the systems of language and writing. Thus begins the work that, incessant and undefined, like waves breaking on a sandy beach, consists in bringing the other back to oneself.

—François Hartog, *El espejo de Heródoto*

The renewal (*renovatio*) that took place throughout much of medieval Europe in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries led to the consolidation of

certain features that form a substantial part of that complex, long-lasting, structural, sociocultural, economic and political phenomenon we call The West. This multi-causal conjuncture –whose description lies beyond the scope of this essay– with tentacles that reach into the social, demographic, economic, political, and cultural domains, spawned a movement opposed to the process of feudalization that began to spread through the continent in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. One of the many effects of this transformation was that medieval cities once again acquired a preeminent role similar to the one they had enjoyed as articulators of space, of relations among people, and of the exchange of ideas and goods during the Roman Empire. It was in this era that the importance of *urbs* as *civitas* resurfaced and, as a result, the urban vocation for knowledge was strengthened with the creation of the first universities, in Bologna in 1089 and Salamanca in 1208, from whose Library comes the image that adorns the cover of this issue of *Relaciones: El Cielo*, probably painted by Fernando Gallego in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

All of this, of course, must be seen in light of the profound revolution in the political relations between the papacy and the feudal lords that arrived with the Gregorian Reform, the transformation that allows us to better understand a series of processes that is peculiar to western culture, including the universalization or homogenization of a shared cultural matrix that permitted the ongoing construction of knowledge based on ancient traditions: invariably in the West, revolution and tradition go hand-in-hand. This process produced not only such phenomena as the diffusion of Roman law through 12<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and the reinterpretation of the ancient medicine and cosmography of Greco-Roman heritage as they were made available in local, ‘vulgar’ languages, but also the important alliance between knowledge and power in the new political and social relations of the West; one consequence of which –among many others– was that the mode of constructing a western identity, long based on defining “the Other” as an entity distinct, was solidly reaffirmed.

The Iberian Peninsula did not participate fully in the feudalization process, especially not in its extreme ruralization, due to the characteristics of the political and cultural conformation of societies

there, where Christians, Moors and Jews had coexisted since the 6<sup>th</sup> century, keeping alive the cities and urban culture of Roman heritage, together with the vocation for knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Those were societies conscious of their multicultural nature whose Christian Monarchs—especially—profited splendidly from intense contacts with their neighbors and access to a large body of Greco-Latin texts translated into Arabic. From very early times this fostered the emergence of schools of translators like the one at Toledo (6<sup>th</sup> century) and ensured that the custom of translating and copying texts would be carried on in the Castilian kingdoms, where it would be linked to the very centers of political power. It is in this context that we must comprehend the origins of the tradition of diffusing ancient texts, and early and late Medieval ones as well, through their transcription into local languages and their utilization as teaching materials, not to mention the key role that this aspect of Castilian culture played in the evangelization process of natives in the West Indies, and the spread of the metropolis' complex cultural matrix out to Iberia's overseas possessions beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The texts in our *Thematic Section* examine certain aspects of this phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> First, María de las Nieves Sánchez González de Hertero expounds on how the authors of texts on medicine and other topics in 13<sup>th</sup>- and 14<sup>th</sup>-century Castile dealt with the Castilian language's lack of technical terms with which to translate and explain texts originally written in Latin or Arabic. The author analyzes the strategies to which writers and translators resorted as they sought to facilitate the reception of the contents of their works while resisting the temptation to coin new terms in Castilian, including such didactic resources as elucidations and interpretations, and the search for lexical parallels.

Similarly, the diverse didactic resources that were brought to bear on the translation of texts on humankind (the body and its diseases) were also applied to texts that focused on the sphere of the Cosmos,

<sup>1</sup> Adeline Rucquoi (1993), *La historia medieval de la Península Ibérica*, Zamora, El Colegio de Michoacán, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> We thank Dr. Rosa Lucas of the Center for the Study of Traditions at the Colegio de Michoacán for coordinating this dossier.

as in the case of the most important astronomy manual of the period, and one that would continue to be used for centuries: *De Sphaera Mundi* by Johannes de Sacrobosco. Written in Latin at the dawn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *De Sphaera*... was translated and edited in several versions on the Iberian Peninsula for it served as the fundamental text for instruction in astronomy at the *Quadrivium* until at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On the basis of a structural and conceptual analysis of this work, and several of its translations, Marta Gómez Martínez elucidates its didactic character and translators' efforts to preserve its nature.

Through his analysis of another 13<sup>th</sup>-century book on cosmology – *Tratado de la esfera* by Campanus de Novara, translated and edited by Friar Alonso de la Veracruz as a complement to his 1557 *Physica Speculatio*, and designed for use in his Faculty of Theology – Salvador Álvarez demonstrates the multi-secular permanence of techniques for teaching and disseminating Christian cosmological knowledge at universities in New Spain. Through this evidence of the continued importance of the Aristotelian scholastic system as a teaching method in 16<sup>th</sup>-century New Spain, Álvarez reveals some of the reasons why the knowledge of astronomy taught at universities in The Indies became increasingly out-of-step with the geographic and cosmographic thinking that characterized the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the knowledge housed at universities and in Friar Alonso's theology courses, practical geographic knowledge of The Indies received a huge boost a few years later thanks to Felipe II's surveys that spurred the elaboration of a series of geographic relations and inaugurated a new style for presenting descriptions of peoples and customs, places and climes; one that over time made it possible to construct a thorough chorography of The Indies. But even during the statistically-influenced epochs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some older ways of elaborating such portrayals continued in vogue, as the document presented in this issue by Sebastián P. Herrera, *Memorias de la misión de San Andrés Cohamiata en el Nayarit*, demonstrates. This text, which Herrera assumes was composed at some point between 1853 and 1872, begins with a detailed account of the region's landscape, orography and flora and fauna, then moves on to

speak of the customs of the Huichol people in general, before closing with vivid descriptions of several festivities.

The *General Section* of this issue presents two articles that, though they return us to the present and the region of Michoacán, refer to age-old western practices mentioned in the second epigraph of this *Presentation*. In both Herodotus' Greece and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Michoacán, the construction of identities tends to draw on resources that are artificial in nature to create stereotypes of "the Other" that make no effort to conceal rivalry and conflict—indeed, may even emphasize them—as a means of reaffirming the identity of self through contrast. In this sense, Philippe Schaffhauser Mizzi's inquiry into the rivalry between Jiquilpan and Sahuayo, two neighboring localities in northern Michoacán, traces the emergence of a social representation of "the Other" ('those not from Sahuayo', or 'not from Jiquilpan') that remits us powerfully to Hartog's analysis of Herodotus'<sup>3</sup> opus and the construction of all things not-Greek as 'barbarous'.

Though the problem of identity is not the central focus of Elizabeth Araiza's essay on Christmas pageants among the Purépecha (one of the few anthropological treatises on this topic), one cannot but contemplate that referent upon perusing her description of the construction of the representation of *rancheros* (antagonists of the Purépecha) as seen through the optic of their appearance in those pageants. Of course, this text explores other currents, but those we will leave for the reader to discover for her/himself.

Finally, in this issue we propose a novel way of integrating the Book Reviews, one clearly distinct from earlier volumes, for it brings together a series of Reviews on a specific topic. On this occasion, we propose grouping them under the rubric: *On the diverse faces of power*.

Víctor Gayol

*English translation by Paul C. Kersey Johnson*

<sup>3</sup> François Hartog (1980), *El espejo de Heródoto. Ensayo sobre la representación del otro*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003.