

Antonio Pigafetta
*A Primeira Viagem
em Redor do Mundo*

Lisbon: Oficina do Livro, 2020, pp. 149

Reviewed by Joana Lima

joana.lima@fc.ul.pt

One can only pick the fruits of fantasy from the tree of science. A vital influence for magical realism, the literary-historical autoptic report of Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe by Antonio Pigafetta illustrates how scientific knowledge and technical expertise are the roots for allowing marvelous ideas to grow and amazing feats to be reached. Its flavours can be enjoyed in the cartographic, geographic, ethnographic, linguistic ways in which Pigafetta describes a world brand new to him, such a wonderer with a fresh taste for novelty that he paid to go on the 1519 expedition. Proving how magical reality can be and how science and technology allow reality to be experienced, Pigafetta wrote *a venture into fantasy*, like Gabriel García Márquez described it. Not an adventure, but a carefully prepared massive logistical enterprise inscribed in the astronomical, cartographic and nautical knowledge that Early Modern Iberian science had been collecting, organizing, experimenting and developing for a century. A venture into something so fantastic as reality, turned canonical travel literature.

A classic recently translated to Portuguese by Oficina do Livro, after years of a publishing void concerning this book in Portugal, *A Primeira Viagem em Redor do Mundo* is a popular edition of Pigafetta's work intended for the great public. Despite the effort made by the publishing house to bring this work back to print, one cannot help to wonder about the criteria for adopting a problematic Spanish adaptation of Pigafetta's book (Fundación Civilter, 2017), where much is lost in translation, as the basis for this Portuguese edition. This unfathomable editorial choice has inevitable compromised the end result, which would have been quite different if any of the four surviving manuscripts available in Italian and French, or a critical edition, would have been chosen instead as the object of translation and as the basis for a more critical edition. A comparative reading of editions of these manuscripts (of which there is an exceptional Spanish popular edition, by Alianza Editorial, 2019) clarifies what is missing in the Portuguese one – the magical side to reality, when wonder meets the eye of Pigafetta, ever so elegantly describing the world he is presented with and the

scientific practices that got him there. With the attempt to make this work available to a vast audience, came an editorial decision to abridge it, thus paradoxically removing its virtue of expressing a state of awe before what no European had ever experienced.

Lost in adaptation, therefore lost in translation, what is missing in the Fundación Civilter edition, hence in the Oficina do Livro edition, is more than the poetic quality of the description of new lands, new seas and new people, always so easy to dismiss as ineffable. Absent elements are to be specifically found when comparing this edition with *Relazione del primo viaggio attorno al mondo*, edited and annotated by Andrea Canova (Editricine Antenore, 1999); *Navigation & découverte de l'Inde supérieure & îles de Malucque*, edited and annotated by Xavier de Castro, Jocelyne Hamon and Luís Filipe Thomaz (Éditions Chandeigne, 2007); *The First Voyage Around the World*, edited and annotated by Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (University of Toronto Press, 2007); or yet the Alianza Editorial edition. From a Literary Studies perspective, several rhetorical aspects from the original text would need philological care and a more conservative textual approach, which would offer accuracy to the translation, syntax, semantics and poetic tone wise. The simplification of complex phrases and sentences, the modification of mythological vocabulary, the literal translation of literary classical topoi, the complete lack of annotations and so bibliography in a book made of foreign references, and the introduction of anachronistic elements – all these editorial choices cut out the sense of otherness, of strangeness, of fantasy in this voyage.

From a History of Science point of view, an exact depiction and translation of scientific, technological, linguistic and ethnographic elements fundamental to Pigafetta's book would be of immense value for both Spanish and Portuguese translations. This sense of inaccuracy can be found in the absence of Pigafetta's thesauri of Tupi, Patagonian, Philippine and Indonesian languages, the first known *exotic* glossaries made by a European, crucial historical sources for both understanding the indigenous societies the seamen in the Magellan expedition met and the nature of the cultural exchanges in these encounters. Unable to know what words made possible communication between Iberians and South Americans or Southeast Asians, the reader loses sight of what is common between such diverse cultures, the core of humanity linguistically organised. The objects and concepts presented to Pigafetta's wondering gaze in these encounters are partially forgotten, also due to the absence of the maps he drew. A testimony to the cartographic nature of this navigation enterprise, these overlooked artifacts are part of an enormous amount of scientific and technological information that sustains the narrative action. Not portraying them with precision undermines this work's literary impression of fantasy flowing from reality, while disseminating historiographical ambiguities. The same happens with the inexact translations of sailing directions, wind systems, geographic coordinates, nautical instruments and weaponry – key elements to understand the role of sixteenth-century Spain and Portugal in the development of nautical science, astronomy and geography.

Despite the characteristics of this edition, which make it rather an adaptation, and so less than a perfect choice for scholars, it has the virtue of bringing to mind the importance of reading the work by Antonio Pigafetta, essential for the study of Early Modern History of Science. A venture into the world, this realistic thus magical book is a must for historians of science who wish to have a taste of science meeting travel literature.

Lisbon, 13 April 2020

www.rutter-project.org

Acknowledgements

The RUTTER project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 833438).