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## THE DISCOURSE OF NATURE IN THE *BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE* OF ALL KINGDOMS<sup>1</sup>

### RESUMEN

Dentro del creciente movimiento crítico de la aplicación de la teoría de la raza a textos de la Edad Media y la Temprana Modernidad, se ha presentado el *Libro del conocimiento de todos los reinos*, una descripción narrativa de la geografía, los pueblos, la heráldica y, en fin, todas las leyendas asociadas con las ciudades y las regiones que aparecen en los *mappamundi* medievales, como un ejemplo de pensamiento racista. En contraste, el presente estudio aplica el método arqueológico estrictamente historicista de análisis discursivo de Michel Foucault para demostrar que este texto no empleaba el concepto de la raza de ninguna manera. Una lectura detenida del posicionamiento del sujeto, los objetos, los conceptos y las estrategias teóricas—los cuatro elementos principales de cualquier formación discursiva, según Foucault—revela que este texto manejaba conceptos geográficos y astrológicos, heredados de la Antigüedad y desarrollados a lo largo de la Edad Media, con el fin de situar cada uno de los reinos del mundo conocido dentro de un discurso de la naturaleza basado en la cosmología y la escatología cristianas, enfocándose especialmente en el Paraíso Terrenal.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Libro de conocimiento*, historia de raza, Foucault, libros de viaje, España - la edad media

### ABSTRACT

As part of the increasing application of critical race theory to medieval and early modern texts, the *Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms*, a narrative description of the geography,

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peoples, heraldry, and legends associated with the cities and regions found on medieval *mappamundi*, has been offered as an example of racial profiling. In contrast, this study applies Michel Foucault's strictly historicist archaeological method of discourse analysis in order to show that this text was not employing a concept of race at all. Rather, a close reading of this text's subject position, objects, concepts and theoretical strategies—the four principle elements of any given discursive formation, according to Foucault—reveals that this text engages geographical and astrological concepts, derived from Antiquity and developed over the course of the Middle Ages, in an effort to situate each and every kingdom of the known world within a discourse of nature based on Christian cosmology and eschatology and centered around the Earthly Paradise.

KEYWORDS: *Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms*, history of race, Foucault, travel literature, Spain—Middle Ages

In the last few decades, there has been a growth in the application of critical race theory to earlier and earlier western texts. This approach has added to an ongoing debate regarding the general methodological problem of anachronism in historical cultural studies. On the one hand, many historians and literary critics start with the premise that race is a universal idea and trace the history of how the expression of this idea has changed as it was adapted to different specific circumstances. On the other hand, other historians claim that race is a specifically modern phenomenon, which took form only in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries. The former accuse the latter of nominalism and point out that they risk overlooking the similarities between forms of hierarchy across all historical periods; the latter accuse the former of anachronism and point out that they risk overlooking the differences between these same forms of hierarchy (Nirenberg 71-4; Hill 2009 1-2). I would suggest that they are both right and both wrong in their own ways. We want to understand the past as an explanation of how we ended up where we are; yet we want to avoid teleological histories which imply that historical events inevitably led to the present. Fortunately, there is a scholar whose methodology points the way out of this philosophical paradox in historical cultural studies: in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault shows how we can take into account both the similarities and differences between historical cultures and our own.

In the context of the Iberian Peninsula, travel literature increasingly has been offered as evidence of “racial thinking” in the Middle Ages (Harney 2). One of the texts traditionally included in this genre is the *Libro del conocimiento de todos los reinos* or *Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms*, most likely written in the last decades of the fourteenth century. I can think of no better way to honor my mentor, Dr. Nancy Marino, than to carry out a close reexamination of race in this text, which she edited and translated into English in 1999. I want to build on the foundation Marino left for us, using the edited text she meticulously prepared, as well as her research into the *Book of Knowledge*, which

she presents in her Introduction. Nevertheless, I also want to move beyond her work in some significant ways, especially with respect to her author-centered approach. Where she saw evidence of this or that characteristic of an anonymous author, I see evidence of discursive practices and epistemic figures of the surrounding culture. Using Foucault's archaeological method, my aim is to bring to light the complex—and for us, difficult to fathom—ways in which medieval Spaniards understood other peoples around the world. In order to understand the *Book of Knowledge*, we need to understand the form that knowledge takes in the Middle Ages. Above all, this book presents other peoples through the lens of a specific understanding of nature that fits within their biblical cosmology.

Foucault's archaeology deals with statements, which are distinguishable from logical propositions, grammatical sentences and speech acts, even though they may or may not overlap with any one or more of these units at any given time (1972 80-84). The statement is not a structural unit, but "a function of existence" (Foucault 1972 86), which can be located and described in relation to and within larger discursive formations. Before we turn to these discourses, let us dwell on the statement, in order to understand how Foucault deals with anachronism: "Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate in visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use)" (1972 128). The statement-event is defined by the "system of its enunciability" (Foucault 1972 129): when we look at the statement as an event, we are asking ourselves: what discursive conditions made it possible for this statement to have been uttered in this way at that precise moment in history? In this way we are examining its "positivity" or "historical a priori" (Foucault 1972 127). On the other hand, the statement-thing is defined by its "system of functioning" (Foucault 1972 129): when we consider a statement as a thing, then we are asking: how has this statement been used in the subsequent history of a discourse? From this perspective, the statement-event is relatable to previous and contemporary statements; any event that happened or any statement that was uttered after that moment of time is irrelevant to the statement-event. Nevertheless, if we want to trace a history of how any given statement or groups of statements was used, interpreted or reinterpreted across time, then we will be dealing with these statements as things.

This crucial difference between statements as events and statements as things allows Foucault to distinguish his archaeology from the history of ideas, which, according to him, does not deal adequately with the problems of precession and resemblance. To establish that any given statement or idea has been preceded by another one which resembles it, does not help us understand how either statement or idea functioned at

the precise moments and locations in which they were uttered or written down. Rather, it is necessary to establish the relationships between any given statement and the larger discourses that surround it and of which it is a part.

Let us take the example of enunciations which are exactly identical. Hopefully, we can all agree that the same phrase, "Species evolve," uttered by an eighteenth-century natural historian, and then repeated word-for-word by a nineteenth-century biologist, must not have meant the same thing. But it is not enough to say that the definitions of the words have changed; this sentence, this proposition, which is identical at the level of grammar or logic, must be understood as two fundamentally different statements, when the events of their utterances are situated within the contexts of their respective discursive formations (Foucault 1972 103; Major-Poetzl 24-25). Nevertheless, we could establish the relationship between these two statements by taking the first statement as a thing and analyzing how it was reinterpreted and recontextualized in the second statement. And, to avoid the accusation of nominalism, this same type of analysis can be carried out with respect to ideas. It is not enough to point out that the same idea is being expressed using different words: in order to understand the idea, it must be analyzed in the forms that it takes, in the functions that it assumes, in the statements that are uttered and their relations with the larger discourses that surround them at those moments in those locations.

All of this leads Foucault to conclude that his archaeological method allows him to forgo the traditional given of change or evolution, in the history of ideas, which inevitably leads to our present, in favor of the analysis of specific transformations in discursive practices (Foucault 1972 172). What he calls the "archive" consists of both the systems of enunciability of the statements-events and the systems of functioning of the statements-things. In this way, the archive "differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration" (1972 129). To avoid anachronism, we can analyze any given statement as an event that functions within larger discourses; to accurately trace the history of ideas, we need to establish how statements as things are reinterpreted and recontextualized between different discourses that exist at different moments in history.

I offer one recent example that illustrates the shortcomings of the kind of traditional history of ideas that Foucault criticizes, as it is applied to the history of race. In one recent study, Gary Taylor deals inadequately with the problem of precession and resemblance. He notes, for example, that although the term "racism" emerged in the twentieth century, the term "colorphobia" was used in the nineteenth century and before. As evidence, he offers the example of Frederick Douglass, who in the mid-nineteenth century described colorphobia using modern medical terms, such as "disease" and "epidemic"

(4). Interestingly, Douglass offers the example of Brabantio in Shakespeare's *Othello*. According to Taylor, "Douglass was right: Shakespeare repeatedly associated the color black with fear, dread, terror, and the devil" (4). What Taylor ignores is that Douglass is reinterpreting Shakespeare, recontextualizing his statements as things within modern, biological discourse. The association between blackness and the devil should be a clue that Shakespeare's statements might also be understood as events that were functioning within a different set of non-biological, religious discourses. Nevertheless, Taylor points out that the term "phobia" was recorded as early as the sixteenth-century as "an abnormal or irrational fear" (4). He leaves out any discursive context whatsoever, implying that the term meant the same thing, functioned in the same way in the sixteenth century as it did in the nineteenth. In an effort to highlight similarity, the question of difference is glossed over. In contrast, Foucault's method offers us a way to examine both similarities and differences simultaneously.

If we now turn to the larger discourses themselves, Foucault identifies four elements that allow us to identify and describe the regularities of discursive formations: objects, enunciative modalities, concepts, and strategies. The objects are the things being discussed in the statements within any given discursive formation. The enunciative modalities concern the possible positions of subjectivity that are taken within the statements. The concepts are used to understand the objects within specific discursive contexts. Finally, the strategies of a discursive formation consist of the choices of themes and theories that emerge within it. In all four elements, archaeology analyzes the relations between statements within the discursive formation. So, for example, the objects of a discursive formation are defined as "a group of relations established between authorities of emergence, delimitation, and specification" (Foucault 1972 44). With respect to enunciative modalities, archaeology searches for "a field of regularity for various positions of subjectivity" (Foucault 1972 55) in any given discursive formation. Archaeology does not describe directly the concepts themselves, but rather as they emerge in the relations between statements, in a "field of presence" (Foucault 1972 57), or a "field of memory" (1972 58), as well as in "procedures of intervention" (1972 58), such as "methods of transcribing" (1972 59) or "modes of translating" (1972 59). Finally, the theoretical choices are described as "points of diffraction" or "points of equivalence" (Foucault 1972 65), as well as its place among other contemporary discursive formations, what Foucault calls the "economy of the discursive constellation to which it belongs" (1972 66). In any given discursive formation, the relations between statements that exist within these four elements—objects, subject positions, concepts and strategies—are themselves interrelated as well (Foucault 1972 72-73).

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to use Foucault's archaeology to trace the history of race from the Middle Ages to the present. For now, let us focus on the *Book*

of *Knowledge* and question the relevance of the modern concept of race. If we employ Foucault's terms, modern scientific racism is one strategy or theory that developed within the larger discourse of comparative ethnology throughout the nineteenth century. The subject positions of this discursive formation would be defined as Europeans and North Americans who are examining other cultures around the world, as they try to explain their differences, both physical and behavioral, from themselves. The more racially oriented approaches in this discourse are distinguishable from other theoretical choices by their use of a variety of biological concepts, such as hereditary genes, as a strategy for explaining observable behaviors. According to these racial theories, "the significant socio-cultural differences and similarities among human populations are the dependent variables of group restricted hereditary drives and attitudes" (Harris 81). As the field of anthropology has developed since then, there has been a significant shift in emphasis within this same discourse of comparative ethnology. Today it is believed that while at one point in our distant past "bio-evolution and cultural evolution were intimately connected," over time "the modification of cultural forms has become less and less dependent upon concomitant genetic changes" (Harris 131). Marvin Harris summarizes the present consensus of anthropologists today regarding all known homo sapiens populations: "the acquisition of the bulk of one group's learned repertory by another need not require a single genetic innovation" and "the rate and direction of culture change among the various infraspecies groupings of Homo sapiens are not at present significantly affected by genetic specialties" (131). In Foucault's terms, while the objects, subject positions and the concepts within the discourse of comparative ethnology have remained relatively constant, the theoretical strategies have undergone a significant shift from the more racially oriented theories of the nineteenth century to the more culturally oriented theories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

When we turn to examine a medieval or early modern European text, it might be tempting to assume that we are dealing with the same discursive formation. Indeed, there are studies that do just that, discussing the *Early Anthropology of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Hodgen), or locating the *Origins of Comparative Ethnology* in the work of Bartolomé de las Casas (Pagden 122). Specifically for our purposes here, recently Michael Harney has offered the *Book of Knowledge* as an example of "racial profiling," employing the definition used in "the context of present-day law enforcement" (77). Through this contemporary racial lens, Harney observes, for example, that: "Skin color is a criterion of discriminatory subcategorization, as in the case of the kingdom of Dongola: 'es tierra muy poblada de cristianos de Nubia, pero que son negros'" (79). The qualifier "pero" seems to lead Harney to conclude: "The very fact that these African peoples are also settled, politically organized folk, and Christians, accentuates the anonymous author's racial awareness" (79). Let us pause and ask ourselves: in terms of Foucault's archaeological analysis, what is happening here and in similar scholarship? In

this study, the statements found in the *Book of Knowledge* are treated as things, taken out of the original discursive context—not only of the work itself, but also of the larger discourses of the time—and situated within modern discussions of racial discrimination. This kind of analysis tells us nothing about this and other statements as events, or the systems of their enunciability. The fact that here, as elsewhere in the *Book of Knowledge*, as we shall see, the author is saying something positive about the “negros” should give us a reason to explore this discursive context further. Indeed, a closer look at the objects, subject positions, concepts, and strategies found in the *Book of Knowledge* will reveal that they do not coincide with modern ethnological discourse.

First, if we want to find “racial thinking” in the *Book of Knowledge*, the subject positions and objects appear superficially to be the same at first glance: a European is looking out at the other peoples of the world, such as Asians, Middle-Easterners and Africans. Yet a close reading reveals an interesting and rather unique subject position. The “I” is one who neither goes out and makes direct observations of behaviors around the world, nor compiles the direct observations of others in an effort to make systematic comparisons between various groups of people. Rather, the subject position is occupied by a reader and commentator of the medieval *mappamundi*. In her Foreword, Marino recounts how Marcos Jiménez de la Espada, the first editor to publish this text in 1877, believed it to be, “a historical account of the travels that an anonymous Franciscan missionary had made throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa in the fourteenth century” (ix). His assertion, however, was met with ridicule on the part of Alfred Morel-Fatio and Manuel Serrano y Sanz, among others. Since then, it has become clear that the author most likely did not make the journey he describes (Marino ix). Scholars have found numerous errors that are easily explained if the author simply misread the map he was using (Marino xxvi). Marino concludes:

What can be surmised from the comparison between extant cartographical works was that the anonymous author of the *Libro del conocimiento* had available to him a map similar to but later than the Angelino Dalorto work of 1339, a map that more closely resembles the Catalan Atlas of 1375. It was probably a work produced by the Catalan school. Whether he enhanced his writing with knowledge obtained from other sources, or whether any of the information was updated by later copyists, can only be left to conjecture. (xxxix)

Indeed, the anonymous author does not say this book is a travel log or journal; he does not say that it is a narrative of a journey he undertook at some point in the past. He gives absolutely no details regarding any preparations or motives for undertaking any journey. The transitions between kingdoms are brief, schematic, and formulaic: “E party del rreynado de Castilla et fuy al rreynado de Portugal, et fallé en el quatro çibdades grandes” (Marino 4). Again, there are no preparations, there is no mention of the motives for the journey, here there is no reference to how he moved from one place to the next, by what

roads, on foot or on horseback, between which cities; there is just the passage from one kingdom to another. In short, there is a prose description almost of a finger moving from one general area on the *mappamundi* to another, from one name of a kingdom to the next. At one point, when he mentions Çerdeña and Corçega, the narrator seems to temporarily forget to continue with his traveling pretense, and simply states: “Apres desta Tunez es la Isla de Çerdeña,” and “Apres de Çerdeña es otra isla que dizen Corçega” (Marino 42). Then he continues the first-person narrative: “Dende torné a Bona” (42). At times, he adds a detail regarding his travelling companions: “et fuyme por la Zaara con unos moros que llevavan oro al Rey de Guinoa en cabellos” (Marino 50). Yet, the formulaic nature of these details is clear, when he repeats almost word-for-word the pretense of travelling with “unos moros que yvan a la Guynoa” only a few lines later (Marino 50).

Relatedly, the objects under study in the *Book of Knowledge* do not coincide with the objects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century comparative ethnology. In her effort to characterize the anonymous author as someone who probably did not make the journey he narrates, Marino summarizes quite accurately how the text describes the various peoples around the world:

While many authors of medieval travel books dwell on the figure, clothing, and customs of the people they come across, the narrator of the *Conoscimiento* has little to say about the men and women of foreign places. Like his remarks about the condition of the lands, his comments are usually limited to a few words about their physical attributes, their intelligence, or their religion. This last element is what he mentions most, and his typical observations have to do with whether or not they are Christians: he calls some schismatic Christians, others are not Catholic Christians, or are Greek Christians; non-Christians are usually referred to as idolatrous, or “people without religion who keep no commandments.” The narrator, however, never expands his comments or includes further details about their religious practices. He makes a cursory reference to their appearance: some are described simply as beautiful, others simply as black. Unlike many other travel writers of the era, he takes no interest whatsoever in the people’s clothing or lack thereof. He describes some of them only as cruel or vile, but he offers no explanation of the behavior that merits these epithets. Most of the people that the narrator encounters are simple-minded, but the Persians as well as the inhabitants of parts of India are said to be wise, again without explanation. The quality and quantity of the narrator’s observations about people he met on his journey do little to convince the reader that he speaks from experience, compared to the abundance of particulars offered by his literary counterparts. (lii)

Marino is making the point that the anonymous author probably did not make the journey he describes himself. I would add that, from an archaeological perspective, her observations clearly suggest that the subject position is not that of a European making or compiling direct observations of his object, the behavior and characteristics of other peoples around the world.



In addition, he does not form larger groups based on continents, like the modern anthropologists. Taylor begins his study with the following assertion: “The variant color of human skin is a biological reality, and the geographical distribution of relatively isolated, differently pigmented human genres until 1400 is a biological, historical and statistical reality” (3). Nevertheless, a quick glance at the Catalan Atlas of 1375 reveals that the geography of the world as depicted on modern maps is a “reality” that was not represented in the same way in the Middle Ages. There are no identifiable continents, such as the ones we today call Africa, Europe and Asia. In fact, in the *Book of Knowledge*, “Africa, a rich city” (Marino 41), is one small kingdom on the southern coast of the Mediterranean, or what today we call the northern coast of “Africa.” “Europa” is reduced to what we today might call “Northern Europe” or “Scandinavia” (Marino 15).

Some black people are located in what today we would call “Africa,” but this association is not consistently expressed in the text. For example, in the kingdom of Gotonie, which modern editors have located in Equatorial Africa, the narrator describes a large lake, with an island in the middle, called Palola: “et es poblada de gentes negras” (Marino 58). None of the other people of this kingdom are described as black; only the people on this island. Moreover, blackness is not exclusive to modern-day Africa. When the narrator arrives at “India la arenosa,” he describes its people as “negros de color et usan todos traer arcos turques. Et son gentes de buenas memorias et sabios en todos los saberes” (Marino 72). The people of the island of Java are also black: “E es tierra muy poblada, pero que no ay ciudades por que todos los moradores biven en los canpos, et cogen muchas especias, et mucha pimienta, et muchas gomas odoríferas. Como quier que es tierra muy caliente. Et las gentes son negras et adoran al Enperador de Catayo, cuyos vasallos son” (Marino 74). Of note here is the moral neutrality with which all of these peoples’ skin color is described as black.

In modern ethnological discourse, race is a theory based on the biological concepts of heredity and evolution. However, before the nineteenth century, the distinction between hereditary and acquired characteristics was simply not possible. Comparative ethnology is based on an evolutionary model, according to which present cultures resemble, to varying degrees, extinct cultures from the past. From this perspective, scholars such as Lewis Henry Morgan arranged distinct cultures in sequential order through history, moving from the simplest forms to the most complex (Harris 150-51). As Foucault has explored in depth, similar evolutionary models developed around the same time in biology and philology. What made these new models for the explanation of evolutionary change possible was an opening up of history itself. History, according to Foucault, from the nineteenth century onward, “is the fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the space of knowledge for the use of such disciplines or sciences as may arise” (1994 219). Until

the early nineteenth century, the biblical chronology was still widely held to be literally true: Sir Isaac Newton famously declared that it was possible to use the Old Testament to calculate man's antiquity, which accordingly did not exceed 6,000 years. Within this relatively limited chronology, it should not be surprising to find in scholarly texts the belief that skin color could change within a single lifetime through changes in climate and diet. Just to give one example, the physician John Hunter wrote in 1775 that all Black children are born white (Harris 85-6). Then, in the early nineteenth century, a series of archaeological and geological discoveries led to a lengthening out of our understanding of the history of both the earth as well as man. In his *Antiquity of Man*, published in 1863, Charles Lyell combined the available geological, archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic evidence in support of the theory that humans must have been walking this earth for at least tens of thousands of years (Harris 147-48). It was this lengthening of the history of the earth that allowed Darwin to develop his theory of biological evolution—he brought Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, published in 1830, with him on the voyage of the *Beagle* (Harris 111-12). And it was this same lengthening of the history of humanity that allowed the discipline of anthropology, only now fully formalized in the last decades of the nineteenth century, to develop racial theories regarding the chronological relationship among classifiably distinct, independent cultures.

What concepts and theories appear in the *Book of Knowledge* with respect to the physical features and moral character of the people's around the world? The narrator's description of the kingdom of Viguy offers him the opportunity to digress on the famous antipodes, where he offers one explanation for skin color:

E sabed que este Mar de India es un braço que entra del grand Mar Oriental, e dizen algunos que atraviesa toda la tierra fasta el Mar Occidental. E los sabios dizen le el Mar Meridional. E deste mar hasta el Polo Antartico es una grand tierra que es la deçima parte de la faz de la tierra, e quando el sol es en Tropico de Capricornio pasa el sol sobre las cabeças de los pobladores, a los quales llaman los sabios antipodas. Et son gentes negras quemadas de la grand calentura del sol, pero que es tierra en que son muchas aguas que salen del Polo Antartico. (Marino 72-4)

Here the geographical concept of the antipodes and the astrological concept of the Tropic of Capricorn—when the sun “turns” at the constellation of Capricorn—combine to present a theory to explain skin color: the sun passes so close over this people's heads that it burns them and turns their skin black.

Similarly, the descriptions of the kingdoms of Trimit and its neighbor, India, contain geographical concepts to explain the peoples' character and physical features:

Et es tierra muy tenplada et muy equalada, de manera que los omes que alli biven et nasçen son de grand vida que biven mas de dozientos años. Et son omes de buenos entendimientos, et sanas memorias, et han profundas sçiençias, et biven por ley. Et dizen que los omes del mundo que

primera mente ovieron sçientias et saberes que fueron estos, et de aqui los ovieron los persianos, et por eso meresçieron la nobleza mas que todos los otros omes. Por que no se egualaron a estos en sçientia nin en saberes, et por esto meresçieron la nobleza sobre todos. E esto es por que son en el comienço del oriente de lo poblado, et las mas de sus villas et sus grandes çibdades, et la rayz deste rreynado es en la clima de medio, onde son las naturas tenpladas. Et tiempran se y los cuerpos et los elementos, et alegranse y et estiendense y los spiritus. Et por ende han mejores entendimientos et mas sanas memorias, et por esto meresçieron la mayor nobleza. En pos estos son los de India que son sola liña equinoçial. E maguer la su tierra es de gran calentura, pero las mas de sus villas son rribera del mar et son muchas yslas, et por eso el ayre resçibe humedad del mar con que se tiempra la sequedad et la calentura. Et con esto se fezieron de fermosos cuerpos et de aquestas formas et de leznes cabellos, et non las faze al la calentura salvo que los faze baços de color. (Marino 82-84)

This passage combines geographical and medical concepts to reproduce the theory of geographical determinism, first espoused by Hippocrates and Polybius (Hannaford 28-30, 64-66). The temperance of the climate where one lives leads to a temperance, or balance of the four elements, which corresponds to a similar balance of the four humors in the body. In addition, this geographical and medical theory is combined with the medieval concept of nobility in order to repeat the common medieval theme of *translatio studii et imperii* (Curtius 384-5): science and nobility began in this kingdom, because it is located in the eastern most part of the populated lands of the earth; from their it progressively moved west, passing through the Greeks and culminating in the Roman Empire.

Indeed, soon after this passage, mentioning the Mar de India leads the narrator to a long digression about how climate determines people's character, ending with a portrait of the ancient Romans:

E sabed que el agua deste mar es caliente commo agua de baño, et crian se en él muy grandes pescados. E los otros dos rreynados son en la partida oçidental del poblado. El primero dellos es la tierra de Babilonia et de Persia, que son tenprada gente por que son en medio de las climas en el lugar do son las naturas et las conplisiones tenpladas ca son en el comienço del medio oçidental del poblado. E por eso son otrosi sotiles et de buenas memorias, et entremeten se en las sçiençias et de los saberes et han señorío et setas et leyes. Et por esto meresçieron la nobleza, mas por que son en la partida oçidental menguales la calentura ya quanto. E por esto son en el segundo grado de la nobleza de los orientales. E por esto los rromanos que son en la clima quinta et toman de la sexta ya quanto, et han señorío et ley et sçiençias et saberes, como quier que menos que los otros. E por eso son ufanosos et orgullosos et librades et guerreros et soberbios. (Marino 84)

As science and nobility moves west, there seems to be a degradation, which culminates in the Romans, who, because they live in the fifth or even the sixth climate, have them to a lesser degree. In addition, climate also explains why they display some moral deficiencies, such as arrogance and pride.

In short, neither the subject positions nor the objects, neither the concepts nor the theoretical strategies, in the *Book of Knowledge* coincide with those of the modern discourse of ethnology. The question we turn to now is this: if the statements-events found in the *Book of Knowledge* are not relatable to this modern discourse, how may we more accurately describe the discourse that does appear there? An archaeological analysis of the objects, subject position, concepts and strategies in this text will show that the statements-events that make up this book are best understood as engaging the medieval discourse of nature based on biblical cosmology. In this discourse, nature is understood as all that which is a creation of God. As such, the histories of each and every kingdom is subordinated to and subsumed within a Christian eschatology and teleology.

In his description of knowledge in the West prior to what he calls the “Classical” episteme of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Foucault identifies commentary as one of the principle forms of discourse. He recalls Buffon’s astonishment upon reading Aldrovandi, writing: “There is no description here, only legend” (Foucault 1994 39). As Foucault explains, for medieval and early-modern naturalists, it was, indeed, all *legenda*, literally things to be read:

When one is faced with the task of writing an animal’s *history*, it is useless and impossible to choose between the profession of naturalist and that of compiler: one has to collect together into one and the same form of knowledge all that has been *seen* and *heard*, all that has been *recounted*, either by nature or by men, by the language of the world, by tradition, or by the poets. To know an animal or a plant, or any terrestrial thing whatever, is to gather together the whole dense layer of signs with which it or they may have been covered; it is to rediscover also all the constellations of forms from which they derive their value as heraldic signs. (1994 40)

In the case of the *Book of Knowledge*, these are the objects of its discourse: all that has ever been said or written about each kingdom. The subject is a compiler of this information, as he traces his finger on his map from one kingdom to the next.

In fact, the objects under study in the *Book of Knowledge* are not limited to the peoples that inhabit the known world; rather, the peoples are mentioned whenever anything about them is a part of the accumulation of knowledge regarding their kingdoms. The objects of this book are all that is known about all the kingdoms, lands and lordships of the known world, including, perhaps most importantly, their heraldry. At the beginning of the book, the text reads: “Este libro es del conocimiento de todos los rregnos et tierras et señorios que son por el mundo, et de las señales et armas que han cada tierra et señorio por sy” (Marino 2). We already saw how the subject almost traces a finger on a map from Castile to Portugal. There, he found four large cities, that is those large enough to be pinpointed and labeled on a map. He also sees there three large rivers: “Tajo et Guadiana et Duero” (Marino 4). He also sees the borders of this kingdom: “Et este

rreynado parte con el Mar de Poniente et con el rreynado de Castilla et Leon” (Marino 4). Finally, he creates a blazon, a prose description, followed by a visual representation (a small sketch or painting), of the arms of that kingdom: “Et las señales del rrey deste rreyno son un pendon con castillos alderredor, et quynas en medio como aqui se siguen” (Marino 4). This section on Portugal is typical: it includes a list of the largest cities, geographical highlights, such as rivers, lakes or mountains, its borders, and finally, the blazon and sketch of the arms. There is no information about its people. In other words, what appears in the text is a commentary or reading of a map. When information about the people who inhabit any given kingdom is mentioned, it is offered as supplemental, secondary to the geographical and heraldic elements, which are always present.

Armed with modern biological, geographical, astronomical and anthropological knowledge and discourse, today we feel a necessity to divide up texts like these into those fragments which we consider “scientific” (Marino liv) or “factual” (Marino xlv), and those which we consider “fantastic” (Marino liii) or “fictional” (Marino xlv). In practice, this approach leads critics to pick out the fragments from one or the other category, quote them in full, and then visually isolate them by surrounding them with their own commentary. This technique robs readers of the ability to appreciate how in the original texts, these fragments are juxtaposed with each other, without any transition or any indication whatsoever that there is any difference between them. All knowledge associated with each kingdom is included, usually introduced with a reference to the generic character of this knowledge: “dizen que”, “diz que”, “sabed que”, etc.

The one constant element present at the end of each kingdom’s description is the blazon and sketch of that kingdom’s heraldic arms, as we have seen. This aspect of the *Book of Knowledge* most likely accounts for its increasing popularity in the fifteenth century, when a growing number of works on heraldry were circulating in Spain. Interestingly, there are even invented heraldic arms for kingdoms and rulers who never existed. This was common in the Middle Ages, from the very time when heraldry itself was becoming standardized, in the mid-twelfth century: heraldic emblems were created for such figures as Moses, Adam, Attila the Hun, Jupiter, Mars, King Arthur, Christ and, of course, the Devil (Marino xlvi).

Foucault has described the episteme of the pre-Classical west, which ended around the beginning of the seventeenth century, as being marked by the figure of similitude. According to Foucault, the four similitudes—convenience, emulation, analogy and sympathy—superimpose hermeneutics and semiology at this time in the West: “To search for a meaning is to bring to light a resemblance. To search for the law governing signs is to discover the things that are alike [...]. The nature of things, their coexistence, the way in which they are linked together and communicate is nothing other than

their resemblance” (1994 29). The structure of the *Book of Knowledge* supports this theory. The repetitive, formulaic nature of the text tends to emphasize the similarities among all the kingdoms of the earth, even the imaginary ones, almost glossing over the differences. Almost every section begins with “Parti” or “I departed” and ends with a description of the heraldic insignia, no matter how different or fantastic their inhabitants or geographical features are. This technique marks textually the limits of each kingdom and encloses the unique, the different, within the same, the similar. After all, everything on earth is there because of God’s divine will.

At the same time, within the descriptions of each kingdom, in the *legenda* associated with them, the text engages the medieval theme of wonder. Wonders, or *mirabilia*, appear in all kinds of medieval texts, including encyclopedias, chronicles, travel narratives, and romances. Although marvels were located everywhere, they were more numerous on the periphery of the medieval known world, in India and Africa but also Scandinavia. Medieval writers and mapmakers knew this tradition primarily through Pliny, Solinus, Augustine of Hippo, Isidore of Seville and a whole genre of texts associated with Alexander the Great (Lorraine & Park 24-6). In Book 21 of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine explained wonders as evidence of the omnipotence of God, and that everything created by God was wonderful. All natural phenomena, whether commonplace or marvelous, depend on God’s divine will: “So, just as it was not impossible for God to set in being natures according to his will, so it is afterwards not impossible for him to change those natures which he has set in being, in whatever way he chooses. Hence the enormous crop of marvels, which we call ‘monsters,’ ‘signs,’ ‘portents,’ or ‘prodigies’” (Lorraine & Park 40).

In this way, similitude and wonder in the Middle Ages may be seen as two complementary faces of the same discourse on nature: everything in nature is the same, or analogous, because it was created by God; our imperfect perception of nature leads us to wonder at things unknown or unknowable to us. In his *Etymologiae*, 11.3.1-2, Isidore of Seville declares that the monstrous is not a contradiction of nature but of human epistemological categories:

Varro says that portents are things which seem to have been born contrary to nature, but in truth, they are not born contrary to nature, because they exist by the divine will, since the Creator’s will is the nature of everything created [...]. A portent, therefore, does not arise contrary to nature, but contrary to what nature is understood to be. Portents are also called ‘signs,’ ‘monstrosities,’ and ‘prodigies’ because they seem to portend and to point out, to demonstrate, and to predict future happenings. (Williams 13)

David Williams has traced the conceptual origins of what he calls medieval “deformed discourse” (4) to the pre-Christian tradition of philosophical negation, which found its medieval expression in Christian Neoplatonic negative theology. According to this theology, God transcends human knowledge and can only be known by what He is

not. Through a process of mental purification of the self-consciously human, limited perception, the ultimate goal of this thought is to know God as paradox: “the One who is source of the many, beyond being yet cause of being, present everywhere within the world while totally transcendent” (Williams 4). The deformation of rational and logical names and signs of things leads to a kind of divination of the human intellect: it allows us not to *repraesentare* concepts and ideas but instead to *monstrare* them (Williams 4). In the Middle Ages, the monstrous was an enigma, and was thus:

revered as the most suitable expression of divine mysteries, precisely because its obscurity suited the extradiscursive nature of its subject [. . .]. The monstrous enigma deforms the fundamentals of signification to communicate what otherwise could not be communicated. While in normal discourse the similarity and appropriateness of the sign to its signified are the criteria for effectiveness and right representation, in deformed discourse similitude is not intended but rather rejected in favour of the jarring and unsettling inaccuracy and impropriety on which enigmatic understanding is based. The intellectual disturbance effected by the monstrous is due not only to the inappropriateness of the particular sign for what is signified, but also to its inherent negation of the mind’s confidence in similitude and mimesis as criteria of language and cognition. (Williams 85)

In the *Book of Knowledge*, marvels appear in the form of *legenda* associated with certain kingdoms. The paragraph on Norway, for example, includes a series of such *legenda*:

En las montañas desta Noruega crian muchas aves girifaltes, açores, falcones. Otrosi crian muchas animalias fuertes, javalis blancos, osos blancos. Et dizen que un infante fijo del Rey de Noruega conquryrio el condado de Flandes en el tiempo del rrey Artur de Breña. Et sabed que de Noruega adelante contra la trasmontana es tierra desabitada en que faze el año todo un día et una noche, seys meses dura el día et otros seys meses la noche, et que ay unas gentes que an las cabeças fixas en los pechos, que non an cuellos ninguno, pero yo non las vy. (Marino 16-18)

As Marino points out in a footnote (“There seems to be no historical basis for this anecdote”), the reference to the conquest of Flanders is probably based on the story of the Knight of the Swan. She also reminds us that the legend of men without necks, common in medieval accounts of *mirabilia*, appeared in texts as early as Pliny and Solinus. Significantly, Marino does not feel the need to comment on the reference to the six-month long days and nights that are found there. Apparently, this is one of the “scientific” observations found in the text. However, to the medieval Castilian reader of this text, whose universe is geocentric, lacking our astronomical understanding of the tilt of the Earth’s axis that stays constant as it rotates around the sun, this phenomenon could have seemed just as wonderous as the neckless people with which it is juxtaposed.

Towards the end of the book, the narrator arrives at Gotia and Yrcania (present-day Ukraine), and he equates this Gotia with another he mentioned earlier, located next to Noruega, and so he repeats some of the same *legenda* he associated with Noruega above:

Esta Gotia et esta Yrcania parten con las altas sierras de la trasmontana. En estas sierras veen la estrella del norte en el medio del çielo, et faze todo el año un dia seys meses dura el dia, et seys meses dura la noche. Et es tierra desabitada pero que dizen que son fallados en esta tierra ommes que han las cabeças pegadas sobre los ombros, que non han cuellos ningunos, et la barva tienen sobre los pechos, et las orejas dellas llegados a los ombros [. . .]. Otrosi son fallados en esta tierra muy grandes osos et puercos javalis blancos, segund que ya conté de suso. (Marino 106)

Earlier, Gotia was a province located between Suevia and Noruega, and containing three cities: Estocol, Calman and Surdepinche (Marino 16). Here, Gotia is located next to Yrcania, but also bordering a large province called Paschar, which Marino locates on the banks of the Volga, which in turn borders on Suevia. After repeating some of the same information about Suevia (the city of Roderin; two large lakes, Lacus Stocol and Lacus Estarse; etc.), he leaves Suevia and travels to Sordepinche, Calman and Estocol, in addition to Sormençes, Ystat and Londis, which borders on Noruega; however, here he does not associate these cities with Gotia (Marino 106). It is useless to attempt to make sense of the geography described here using modern maps or to demand systematicity of the anonymous author; in this text what is important is the accumulation of any *legenda* that may be associated with each kingdom on the map.

The high point of the voyage of the narrator is his description of the Earthly Paradise. He first mentions it when describing the mythical River of Gold: “nasçe de las altas sierras del polo Antartico do dizen que es el Paraisso Terrenal” (Marino 56). As we shall see, this is not the modern-day Antarctica, but rather a mythical, faraway place, literally on the other side of the world, where (it is said) the Eden of Genesis is located. In his description of the king of Amenuan, the text provides another hint that we are approaching it: “En este rreynado de Amenuan entra un braço del rrio Eufrates, el qual rrio nasçe de las altas sierras del Polo Antarico do diz que es el Paraiso Terrenal” (Marino 60). Of course, this is one of the four rivers that flow from the Earthly Paradise. As the text edges closer and closer, the legendary Preste Juan first appears:

Et llegué a una grand çibdat que dizen Graçiona, que es cabeça del ynperio de Abdeselib, que quiere dezir siervo de la cruz. Et este Abdeselib es defendedor de la iglesia de Nubia et de Etiopa, et éste defiende al Preste Juan, que es patriarca de Nubia et de Etiopa et señorea muy grandes tierras et muchas çibdades de cristianos. Pero que son negros como la pez et quemanse con fuego en las fuentes en señal de cruz et en rreconoscimiento de bautismo. Et como quier que estas gentes son negras, pero son omes de buen entendimiento et de buen seso, et an saberes et çiençias, et an tierra muy abundada de todos los bienes, por que ay muchas aguas et muy buenas de las que salen del Polo Antarico do dizen que es el Paraiso Terrenal. (Marino 60)

Here, let us analyze how the concept of skin color functions in this text. It is true that the skin color of this people is contrasted with their religion, knowledge and wisdom, as Harney notes (79). However, the result of the contrast is not to locate them as an



inferior “race” with respect to Europeans; on the contrary, their blackness, which in any case is probably explained by their geographical location in the world, as we have seen, is subordinated to their religion, which allows them to develop all those things which make them civilized. Religion makes these people their equals, not their inferiors, despite their different skin color.

When the narrator finally arrives at the land of Preste Juan, he explicitly invokes the theme of wonder with respect to the Earthly Paradise. On the Euphrates river, he found Malsa:

do mora sienpre'l Preste Iohn, patriarca de Nubia et de Etiopia [. . .]. Et desde que fuy en Malsa folgué y un tienpo por que via et oya cada dia cosas maravillosas. Et pregunté por el Parayso Terrenal que cosa era et que dezian del. Et dixeron me omes sabios que eran unos montes tan altos que confinan con el círculo de la luna et que los non podia ver todo ome, ca de veynte omes que fuesen non los verian los tres dellos, et que nunca oyeran dezir de ome que alla subiese. Et omes ay que dizen que los vieron a la parte de oriente, et otros a la parte de medio dia. Et dizen que quando el sol es en Geminis veen los a medio dia, et quando el sol es en Capricornio veen los a la parte de oriente. [. . .] Et en todo tienpo da el sol en aquellos montes, quier de noche quier de dia, quando del un cabo, quando del otro. Esto es por que la meitadd destos montes son sobre el orizonte et la otra so el orizonte, en tal manera que ençima de los montes nunca faze noche, nin tiniebra, nin faze frio, nin calentura, nin sequeadat, nin umidat, mas mucho equal tenplamiento. Et todas las cosas asi vigitables como sentibles et animales que alli son, non pueden jamas conrronper nin morir. Et dixeron me otros secretos muchos de las virtudes de las estrellas, asi en los juyzios como en la magica, et virtudes otrosi de las yervas, et plantas, et mineras. Et vy ende cosas maravillosas. Et los griegos dizen a este logar Ortodoxis, et los abraicos dizen le Ganheden, et los latinos Paraiso Terrenal por que sienpre ally es grand tenpramiento. (Marino 62-64)

As this passage makes clear, all the objects, concepts and strategies that we have analyzed in this *Book of Knowledge*, and which we related to a medieval discourse of nature, are subsumed within biblical cosmology. Referring to astrological concepts, we already saw how the Tropic of Capricorn was used to explain skin color. Here, the Earthly Paradise is located in a mountain range that reaches up to the circle of the moon. When the sun is in the constellation of Gemini, it is seen to the north; when it is in Capricorn, it is seen to the west. Elsewhere, we saw how there was a place far to the north where the days and nights were six months long. Here, we find that in the Earthly Paradise the sun never sets, because half of the mountains are above the horizon and the other half are below it. Referring to medical and geographic concepts, in India we saw how the temperance of that climate determined a whole set of physical and moral characteristics in its inhabitants. Here, we find that in the Earthly Paradise not only is it never night, but also it is never dark, nor even cold, hot, dry or wet, but a great even temperature always. In short, the climate in the Earthly Paradise is so temperate, that the four elements, which are analogous to the four conditions of hot, cold, wet and dry, which

are in turn analogous to the four humors in the body, are all in such a perfect state, that all living things there are immortal. As it turns out, all kingdoms on earth are but poor reflections, to a greater or lesser degree, of this Earthly Paradise. And to know things about the Earthly Paradise is to know the hidden secrets of the cosmos: the virtues of the stars, divination and magic, as well as the virtues of the herbs and plants and minerals. In short, to know these things is divine; it is to know all that God knows.

On the other end of the moral spectrum of this same discourse of nature, in the Montes Caspios, we find the legendary castles of the biblical Magog and Gog:

Dentro desta Tartaria son muchedunbre de gentes sin cuenta, et non guardan ningund mandamiento de Dios salvo non fazer mal a otro. Et son gentes muy esentas et fuertes lidiadores de pie et de cavallo, en tal manera que el Grant Alexandre no los pudo conquistar nin les pudo entrar aquellos montes, pero que los ençerró et atapóles las puertas del fierro con grandes peñas, en tal manera que estodieron gran tiempo en aquel ençerramiento. E despues desto deliberaron se de aquel ençerramiento et salieron et conquirieron muy gran partida del mundo. Por que de aquel linaje salieron todos los del imperio de Catayo, maguer agora son contrarios. E dese linaje salieron los del imperio de Armalet, et del imperio de Aravia, et de Mesopotania, et todos los persianos, et los del imperio de Sara, asi turcos commo tartaros, et saraynos, et godos, como quier que algunos dellos se tornaron a la ley de Abraham et otros se tornaron moros. E dizen los sabios de la Tartaria que quando se conplieren los siete mil años de la era de Adam serán señores de toda la faz de la tierra, et que farán tornar todas las gentes del mundo a su ley et a su libertad. E çierto ellos non han ley ninguna, nin guardan ningund mandamiento de Dios salvo non fazer mal a otro [ . . . ]. Et en este castillo de Magot moré un tiempo por que veyá et oya cada dia cosas maravillosas. E ala parte del nort confinan con la Tartaria çerrada las tierras de Albizibi, que son tierras yermas et deshahitadas, pero que en algunos lugares habitan gentes, et son omes viles et comen la carne et los pescados crudos et han los rostros luengos como canes, pero que son blancos et fazen todas las cosas que veen fazer, et llamanlos sinofalos. Et yo vi uno dellos en la çibdad de Norgançio. (Marino 80-82)

The theme of wonder here is employed to suggest the opposite of the temperance, both climatic and social, found in the Earthly Paradise and its surrounding lands. The Tartars here are synonymous with moral depravity: the descendants of Gog and Magog, two biblical tribes who, according to various medieval *legenda*, were followers of Satan who one day would bring about Judgement Day and the destruction of the world (Marino 80). The theme of prophecy is employed to refer to this destruction, in the form of “liberty” or licentiousness, a negative political concept in the Middle Ages, associated with a lack of self-control or rule of law. The concept of lineage, which in the medieval and early modern Hispanic cultures did not function in the same way as modern race (Hill 2005 225), is evoked to suggest that the enemies of Christendom, i.e. the Arabs and Moors, are among their offspring, although some of them, i.e. the Goths, eventually returned to the law of Abraham. In contrast to modern racial theories, which, as we have seen, relied on a long view of the history of the earth and humanity, on the order

of tens or even hundreds of thousands of years, here the end of the world will occur exactly seven thousand years after God created the world. With this chronology, some peoples exercise their freewill in order to return to the law of Abraham; others do not. These peoples' physical prowess is mirrored by their moral depravity: they obey none of God's commandments, except not to harm one another. In the Earthly Paradise, we saw how the perfect temperance of the climate led to the immortality of all living things. Here, the lands surrounding the castles of Gog and Magog are barren and uninhabited. Animal-human hybrids were associated with moral depravity in the Middle Ages: when barbarians practiced adultery, incest and the like, nature sometimes acted "against her own laws," as Gerald of Wales put it in his *Topographia Hibernie*, composed around 1185 (Lorraine & Park 27). Here also, the men who inhabit these intemperate lands are the famous cynocephali, vile, dog-faced men who eat raw meat. Interestingly, their skin color is white: as it turns out, blackness was not always everywhere associated with moral depravity.

In sum, I hope to have demonstrated that an archaeological analysis of any given text, which understands each statement as an event and aims to reveal its system of enunciability, can give us an accurate picture of how it functioned in its own specific discursive context. In the case of the *Book of Knowledge*, we have a series of statements that engage in identifiable ways the discourse of nature based on biblical cosmology, which existed at the time it was written. Now, in the future we could trace the history of how this text, understood as a series of statements-things, was read and interpreted, re-read and re-interpreted. We could start with the observation that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, its credibility was never questioned at all, and that several explorers relied on it for their own navigations and even desired to find Preste Juan as well as other lands mentioned in its *legenda* (Marino xvii-xix). We could also compare and contrast the statements found in this book and those found in documents related to the blood-purity statutes or the discovery and colonization of America: do these relatively later statements engage the same discourse of nature in the same way that we find in the *Book of Knowledge*, or can we establish relations with different discourses, with different objects, subject positions, concepts and theoretical strategies? On the other hand, I hope to have demonstrated that to take these statements-things and to jump several centuries, recontextualizing them within modern, biological theories of race really does not add to our understanding of what the text itself was doing in its own context; it simply adds more evidence of how race has become such an important, all-encompassing theme in our own society as to be practically unavoidable in scholarly discourse.

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