

PROJECT WHITE PAPER

An Operating Manual for a Closing World

*The fourteenth-century Libro del Conoscimiento
as archive, armorial, circuit, and contingency file*

A reading of the Castilian Book of the Knowledge of All Kingdoms
against its pre-translation witnesses, its painted devices,
and the Eurasian system that died while it was being written.

28 August 2026

Working papers: complete modern English rendering · master findings · armorial / Z collation · map and timeline

Abstract

The anonymous Castilian Libro del Conoscimiento de todos los reinos has been filed, by turns, as a Franciscan travelogue, an imaginary voyage in the Mandeville fashion, a clerical encyclopedia, and a world roll of arms with a travel pretext. This paper argues that those labels name surfaces. The book is a portable operating manual for a world-system that was closing in the author's lifetime: the Mongol-era roads to Cathay, the Ilkhanid court at which Armenian Christians still stood as imperial guards, the Latin merchant-missionary corridor, and the Atlantic face of Africa before official conquest narratives rewrote its names. The title states the job — kingdoms, signs, and the lords who provision them. Geography is the drawer. The painted device is the file. The first-person circuit from Seville to Seville is the proof-structure that keeps the file from being dismissed as a copied atlas. Magot, not Cathay, is the eastern hinge. Two roads are written as recipes. Prester John is moved to Africa. France and Navarre are already being repainted between manuscripts Z and S. In 1402 the Béthencourt expedition used the book as a kit. That afterlife is the book doing the work it was built for.

Contents

1. The object and the problem of motive
 2. What was disappearing on the author's clock
 3. Form as argument: title, computus, circuit, sign
 4. The seven-leg world file
 5. Clocks, day-modules, and the two roads
 6. The armorial as filing system, and the Z / S rewrite
 7. Reliability without abandoning the first-hand premise
 8. Afterlife: 1402 as the book's own proof
 9. Implications
 10. Open questions and method
- Sources and project volumes

1. The object and the problem of motive

The book's full title, from the Castilian rubric, is a book of the knowledge of all the kingdoms, lands, and lordships that are in the world, and of the signals and arms that each land and lordship has, and of the kings and lords who provision them. Four manuscripts survive: S (Madrid, BNE MS 1997), the most complete text and the base of Jiménez de la Espada 1877 and Markham 1912; N (BNE MS 9055); R (Salamanca BUS MS 1890); and Z (Munich, BSB Cod.hisp. 150), the Zurita copy recovered in 1978 and edited in facsimile by Lacarra, Lacarra Ducay, and Montaner in 1999. Z, N, and R appear to share one lost exemplar. S descends from another. Painters worked from written blazons. That is why the same sentence produces different pictures.

Jiménez presented an authentic Franciscan itinerary written about 1350. Contemporaries mocked that claim. Later criticism settled on an imaginary travelogue, composed perhaps in the 1370s–1380s, fashionable after Polo and Mandeville, whose real payload was an armorial of some one hundred devices. Lacarra called the reading sapiential: a didactic encyclopedia that happens to walk. Marino asked whether a herald might have used travel as a pretext for a world roll of arms. All of these describe what the book contains. None of them say why a Castilian in that century would weld itinerary, hydrography, heraldry, day-counts, two roads to Cathay, a named gate at Magot, and a closed circuit home to Seville into one object.

The working premise of this project is that the voice is first-hand enough to be treated as an itinerary of body and report, not as a whim. The structures argued below do not depend on that premise. They are on the page. The premise only changes their weight.

2. What was disappearing on the author's clock

He dates one day only: 11 September 1304, stacked on seven eras — Hebrew AM 5065, Flood 4407, Nebuchadnezzar 2502, Alexander 1617, Caesar / Spanish Era 1343, Christ 1304, Arabs 706. The one- and two-year misses on Flood, Alexander, and Hijri are transmission drift in an Alfonsine clerk, not a different birthday. If that birth holds, he is of military and travel age in the last years of the open Eurasian corridor, and of writing age after it has begun to fail.

The Ilkhanate — the Persia in which he says Armenian Christians still guard the emperor — collapses when Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan dies in November 1335. The narrative treats that death as a climax: a vow to convert, an Armenian cross in the van of 1.5 million cavalry, a Hajji-poisoning. After 1335 that court does not exist. The Franciscan-Dominican road to Cathay is dying on the same clock. John of Montecorvino reaches Khanbaliq in the

1290s and dies around 1328–1330. By the 1350s Latin priests in China are effectively gone. When the Ming take Dadu in 1368 the Yuan window shuts, and Europe forgets the see of Khanbaliq so completely that the later Jesuit mission thinks it is first. The book still lists Solin, the Magi monuments, Christian merchants from Cathay at Cato, and a sixty-five-day river up to Magot. If the painted book belongs to the 1370s–1380s, that eastern matter is salvage.

Özbeğ of the Golden Horde reigns 1313–1341. The red mark on white at Norgancio and Sara is a version of the Horde *tamga* used by Mengü-Timur, Toqta, and Özbeğ, and drawn in Z and R in a form that also sits on the Dulcert map of 1339. Writing the seal down is how a polity remains recognizable after the men who used it are dead.

Nearer erasures run in parallel. Acre has been gone since 1291; Jerusalem is already pilgrimage memory. The papacy sits at Avignon, so Rome is a hollow capital. The Templars were destroyed in his childhood. After 1347 the plague rewrites cities and labor. Castile is unfinished against Granada. France changes its coat from a field sown with lilies to three lilies in 1376. That last rewrite is visible inside the tradition itself: Z paints France *semé*; S paints three lilies. The book is being overwritten while it is being copied.

3. Form as argument

3.1 The title demotes lived experience

Lacarra observed that the rubric elevates *conoscimiento* and *señales* and relegates the first person. That is correct and insufficient. The first person is not the subject. It is the authentication protocol. A copied atlas can be called a copy. A body that leaves Seville and returns to Seville is harder to dismiss. Even where the eastern interior arrived by merchant report, the form is testimony. Testimony is what you write when you expect the next generation to be told a different story.

3.2 The computus is the same skill as the flags

Before he moves a mile he translates one day across Hebrew, Flood, Chaldean, Alexandrian, Spanish Era, Incarnation, and Hijri. That is not vanity. It is the demonstration that time can be converted without losing the object — the same operation he will perform on sovereignty marks when dynasties repaint them.

3.3 Magot, not Cathay, is the hinge

Cathay is a city-list and a seated khan with a Turkish bow and a gold apple. Magot is a named castle, one of the gates of enclosed Tartary, where he stays “for a time” and then turns west. That is Alexander-wall / Gog-Magog geography. When the Mongol world-system breaks, the old sacred map comes back up through the floorboards. He files the gate because gates outlast courts.

3.4 Prester John is re-sited, not invented

The book is the first European text to park Prester John in Africa, under Abdeselib, Servant of the Cross, defender of the church of Nubia and Ethiopia. The eastern Christian emperor is no longer findable in India. Hope is moved onto the Nile, on the same page as the 1291 Vivaldi wreck. That is not ornament. It is the relocation of a remaining Christian king after the old site has gone dark.

4. The seven-leg world file

The six-chapter modernizations of 2026 rendered the European–Levant–Persian spine and omitted half the book. The pre-translation circuit is seven legs that close on themselves.

Leg	Arc	What it files
I	Castile - France - Flanders - Rhine - Baltic - Bohemia - Poland - Lviv	Highest first-hand density. Civic lists, dynastic arms.
II	Sweden / Gotland / Norway - Britain - Ireland - western isles - Galicia - Gibraltar - Granada - Aragon	Ocean loop and second Spain. Polar day. Fortunate Lake.
III	Narbonne - Avignon - Italy - Sicily - Venice - Hungary - Morea - Rhodes - Crete	Mediterranean civic and papal core.
IV	Anatolia - Cilicia / Colchis - Cyprus - Syria / Jerusalem - Egypt - Maghreb	Levant plus first Africa. Golden Fleece. Jordan knot.
V	Boujdour - 25 Atlantic islands - Sahara - Guinea - Dongola - Abdeselib / Prester John - Aden / Mecca - India - Java - Cathay - Magot	The omitted half of the world. First grouped Canaries / Madeiras / Azores. First African Prester John.
VI	Bocarin (25 days) - Cato (35) - 125-day spur - Urgench - Caspian / Coman ship - Tabriz - Shiraz - salt ark	Eastern hinge. Özbek tamga. Abu Sa'id war.
VII	Kur - Mesopotamia - Cyprus - Aegean - Constantinople - Black Sea - Derbent - Volga - Sweden - Flanders - Seville	Return braid. Z silent at the end. S and R close the circuit.

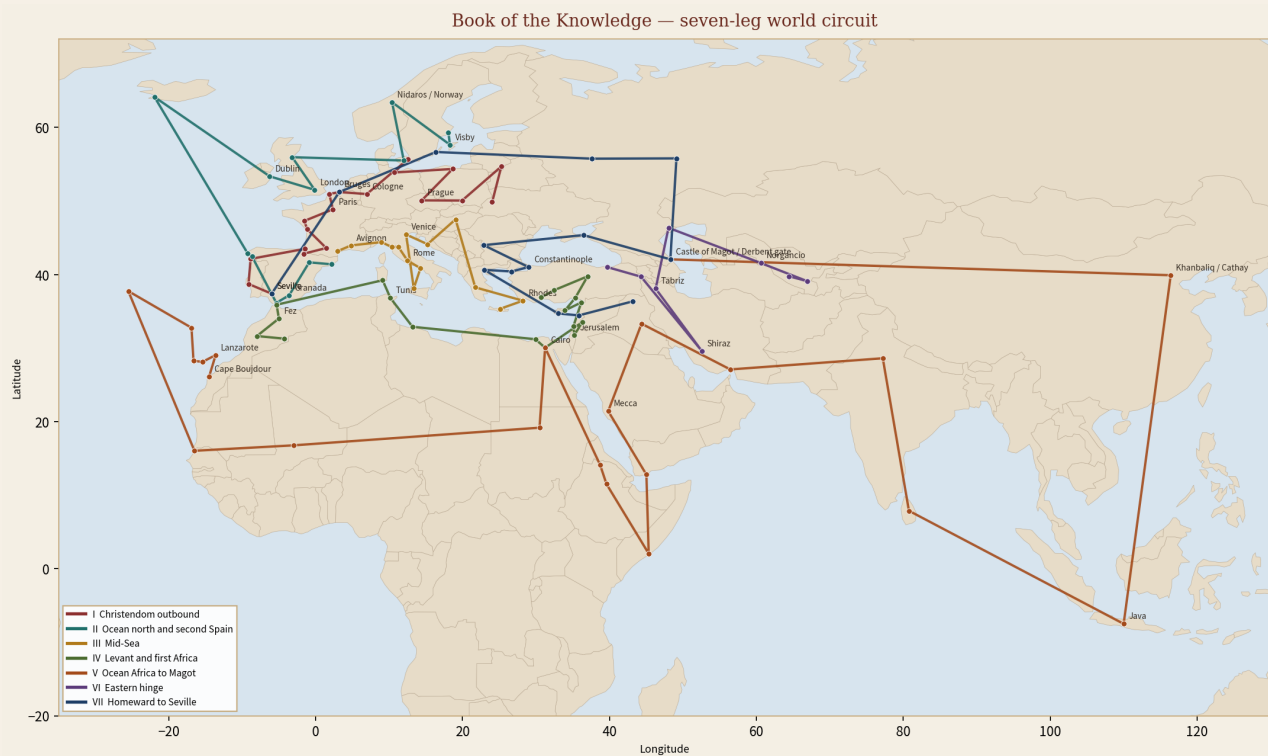


Figure 1. Seven-leg circuit plotted from the reconstructed stop-list. Leg V pulls the file off the Mediterranean and onto Java and Khanbaliq before hooking west to Magot. The line is the claim of the book, not a measured caravan track.

Critics call the path a zigzag. Under a first-hand or hybrid-first-hand premise it is coastal collection, two African attempts, and one Asian attempt, written in atlas order so the flags stay sequential. The last sentence of the source narrative is the author's own close: Flanders, and from there to Seville, the city from which he first started.

5. Clocks, day-modules, and the two roads

The book uses days' journeys as its distance-currency. Two modules dominate. The southern and Indian module runs 40 (Red Sea inland; Java's length), 50 (Indian gulf), 60 (Dongola to Cairo), 65 (River of Guinea; Magot river north). The imperial module is 125 days for the Caspian mountain spur and again for the length of Persia from the Caspian to Hormuz, with Persia 100 days wide from the Kur to Shiraz, and enclosed Tartary 100 by 70. Local measures sit under those: Loire gulf to Paris, four days; Calais to England, eight miles; Denmark to Norway, sixty miles; Draa, six populated days; Magot to Bocarin, twenty-five; Cathay merchants to Cato, thirty-five; Norgancio to the Caspian shore, thirty.

One hundred and twenty-five days is the longest span he will treat as one object. He uses it for a mountain system and for an empire, which means he classed both as one kind of thing: a trans-Asian barrier that takes a season and a third to cross. Three hundred and sixty towns inside the Armenian mountain ring is a completeness number, not a census.

The two roads to Cathay are written as recipes, not as ornament.

Road 1, north / Caspian. Constantinople - Greater Sea - Sea of Letana (Azov) - Avegazia - land of King David - Greater Armenia - Iron Gate - Sea of Sara - island of Janula / Gulf of Monimenti - Trastago - Norgancio - Caspian mountains - Cato - Bocarin - townless Asia to Cathay.

Road 2, south / Persian. Mediterranean - Cyprus - Greater Armenia - Savasco in Turkey - Euphrates at Argot - Mesopotamia - Cur in Persia - Tabriz - Sarmagant - east through Sçim, where the people live in the fields, to Cathay.

After 1335 the north-Persian road dies with the Ilkhanate. Writing both roads is contingency planning. If the north road fails, here is the south one.

A compressed single-circuit reconstruction, used only as a working clock in the companion atlas, places the man on the road from about 1328 to 1337 so that the Magot stay and the Abu Sa'id report fall in 1335, when a man born in 1304 is thirty-one. Those years are not in the book. The sequence is. If the book is several journeys or a later compilation, stretch the years; do not delete the order.

6. The armorial as filing system, and the Z / S rewrite

Ashley and Clemmensen count on the order of one hundred painted devices, then a final non-armorial Baltic–Flanders–Seville close. European arms are often recognizable: Castile quarterly castles and lions; Flanders a black lion on gold; the Empire a crowned black eagle; Venice the winged lion; Cyprus mixing Jerusalem crosses and French lilies. Distant arms are built from plausible tinctures — yellow flags with white stars for Bocarin and Cato; Özbek's red mark on white; Prester John's cross, which every manuscript invents differently; the Great Khan seated with bow and orb.

Shared devices are linkage marks. Bocarin and Cato fly the same starred yellow field. That is either one dynasty, one informant, or one visual system. Prefer the words when the painting drops the stars. The Armenian Christians as trusted guards, the Coman Christian ship on the Caspian, and the Cathay Christian merchants are the same kind of mark in prose instead of paint: Christendom already has agents east of the expected line.

File	S (Markham base)	Z / N / R family	What the split means
France [6]	Three gold lilies on blue (post-1376)	Z fol. 3r: field semé of lilies	Dates the painted book, not necessarily the journey.
Navarre [4]	Chain-net of Las Navas	Lilies over chains (Capetian-Évreux hybrid)	S reads the old badge. Z-family reads the new court.
Lemberg [14]	Green flag, red cross	Cross formy from a red crescent	Poland / Lithuania / Lviv are confused in every copy.

File	S (Markham base)	Z / N / R family	What the split means
Prester John	Cross flanked by crooks	Each MS invents a Christian-staff picture	Agreement is office, not drawing.
Özbeğ / Sara	White field, red sign	Tamga matching Dulcert 1339 in Z/R	Strongest lock of paint, words, and outside history.
End of book	Flanders - Seville	Z incomplete; silent	Follow S/R for the circuit's proof.

The France and Navarre splits are the book catching itself in the act of being rewritten. That is the user's first reason made visible in the witnesses. The motive under the motive is to build a file that still works after the rewrite.

7. Reliability without abandoning the first-hand premise

Europe nearest Castile is dense with cities, rivers, and checkable dynastic arms. The Atlantic and African names are rich and the walking verbs thinner — inventory density. The eastern hinge reverses that: fewer names, more stay / saw / embarked. Magot, the cynocephalus at Urgench, the Coman ship, Tabriz, the salt-stone ark, and the Abu Sa'id war are the first-hand claims that matter. Russia and the last Baltic hop are thin. Z does not cover them. That is the pattern of a man who collected coasts hard and interiors from merchants, which is exactly what a traveler of 1330 would do, and also what a clerk building a world-file from mixed sources would do. The two descriptions are not enemies.

Marvels — Golden Fleece, cynocephali, Noah's salt mountain, Paradise rivers, enclosed Tartary — sit inside the same visual vocabulary as the Hereford Mappa Mundi and the Catalan Atlas. They do not, by themselves, prove fabrication. They prove that he spoke the geographic language of his century. A traveler who already thought in portolan could write memory in portolan.

8. Afterlife: 1402 as the book's own proof

In 1402 Jean de Béthencourt and Gadifer de la Salle sailed from La Rochelle for the Canaries. Their chaplains, Pierre Bontier and Jean Le Verrier, compiled *Le Canarien*. When the lord wanted the mainland beyond Cape Bojador — the River of Gold, and through it the land of Prester John — the priests fell back on “the book of a Spanish friar.” Nordenskiöld and Jiménez identified that book as the *Libro*. Within two generations of composition the text is already operational geography: a port-and-arms manual lifted by captains, not a romance read by stay-at-homes.

That afterlife is not an accident that later happened to a travelogue. It is the book performing the job its form announces. Name the islands. Paint the signs. Give the days to the gold river. Re-site Prester John where a ship from the Canaries might still hope to reach him. The 1402 use is the control experiment.

9. Implications

If the itinerary is first-hand, or first-hand in the European and Persian bands and reported beyond, then several things follow that the imaginary-voyage reading discards.

A Christian merchant corridor still ran from the Aegean to Urgench in the 1330s, with men who claimed Cathay. Armenian clergy at the Ilkhanid court were the main translators of Persian high politics into Latin-Christian narrative. Urgench was a market where steppe, Islam, Christianity, and “marvel-races” were visible together. Tabriz was capital-of-empire and Shiraz capital-of-stars, “in the line of the centre of Persia.” The Caspian was a Christian-navigated sea, not only a Muslim one. Noah's ark was already tied to a white salt lithology and a local ban on successful ascent. West Africa had a named island-set and a River of Gold precise enough that Norman-French

captains copied it.

The quiet argument of the book is not tourism. It is that Christendom already has marks, roads, and allies inside the Mongol-Islamic belt and along the Atlantic face of Africa. That is an intelligence object. It is also a Castilian claim-file. The world-atlases that survive as maps from this century are Majorcan-Catalan: Dulcert 1339, the Catalan Atlas of 1375. This book does the same job in Castilian, with Seville as origin and return. The knowledge of coasts, islands, gold rivers, and eastern roads will not live only in Barcelona and Majorca.

The sentence he never writes, and which the book executes, is this: file every sovereignty under its sign, because the sign will be repainted; file every road as a recipe, because the courts that kept the roads open are dying; file the Christian agents already east and south of the expected line, because those networks will be forgotten; file Magot as a gate, not a marvel, because when empire fails the old apocalypse-map returns; close the circuit at Seville so the file has a home port and a witness.

10. Open questions and method

Exact modern fixes remain unsettled for Cato, the castle of Magot, Raansinlia, Solin-in-Cathay, Malsa, Organa, and Amenuan. Witnesses split on twenty-five versus thirty-five days from Magot. The France of three lilies in S may be authorial or a later painter; that is the main argument for a 1380s book-object even if the journey-memory is older. Z has not been collated here line by line against S; the collation in the companion armorial volume is restricted to variants that change a flag, a political reading, or a road. Africa south of the Atlas is still richer in names than in verbs. None of those gaps remove the circuit, the modules, the two roads, the Seville close, or the 1402 use.

This white paper draws on Jiménez 1877, Markham 1912, Marino 1999, Lacarra / Lacarra Ducay / Montaner 1999, and Ashley–Clemmensen 2021, read against a complete modern-English rendering of the S-family narrative, a stemmatic note on Z/N/R, and a seven-leg stop-list plotted as a world circuit. It does not replace a diplomatic three-column edition of Z facing S. It is the reading edition of the motive problem: why this form, in this century, with this close.

Sources and project volumes

Jiménez de la Espada, Marcos, ed. *Libro del Conoscimiento de todos los reynos...* Madrid, 1877. Markham, Clements, trans. *Book of the Knowledge of All the Kingdoms...* Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser. 29, 1912. Marino, Nancy F. *El libro del conocimiento de todos los reinos*. Tempe, 1999. Lacarra, María Jesús, María del Carmen Lacarra Ducay, and Alberto Montaner, eds. Facsimile of MS Z, BSB Cod.hisp. 150. Zaragoza, 1999. Ashley, Steven, and Steen Clemmensen. “The Book of Knowledge: A Late Fourteenth-Century Armorial Travelogue.” *The Coat of Arms* 4th ser. 4, no. 238 (2021). Jackson, Peter. *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410*. Bontier and Le Verrier, *Le Canarien* (1402 expedition; Hakluyt Society English, 1872).

Companion volumes from this project, 28 August 2026: *Master Findings*; *Complete Modern English Rendering*; *Armoial and Z Collation*; *Map and Timeline*, with interactive stop-list at Book_of_the_Knowledge_itinerary_map.html.

End of the white paper.