

BOOK OF THE KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 1: Spain and Portugal

A Modern English Translation — Exhaustive Version

In the name of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, three individual persons in one essence, I was born in the kingdom of Castille, in the reign of the very noble King Don Fernando son of the very noble King Don Sancho, when the era of the world, according to the Hebrews, was 5065 years, and the era of the deluge 4407, and of Nebuchadnezzar of Chaldæa 2502 years, and of Alexander the Great of Macedonia 1617, and of Cæsar Emperor of Rome 1343, and of Christ 1304 years, and of the Arabs 706, on the 11th day of the month of September.

There are in the kingdom of the said King 28 cities and many other towns, castles, and villages. Three of the cities are Archbishoprics, namely Seville, Toledo, and Compostella, and 25 are Bishoprics, namely Algesiras, Cordova, Jaen, Murcia, Badajos, Soria, Ciudad Rodrigo, Zamora, Salamanca, Plasencia, Avila, Segovia, Palencia, Cuenca, Osma, Astorga, Burgos, Leon, Oviedo, Orense, Tuy, Mondoñedo, Calahorra, Sigüenza; and in this kingdom there are four principal chains of mountains. The mountains of Bizcaya which are along the coast of the western sea, and are continued by the heights of Asturias; the other chain they call the mountains of Segovia, where there are many towns and villages, the other they call the Sierra Morena, and the fourth is known as the Sierra de Segura, where two great rivers have their origin, namely the Guadalquivir, anciently called the Betis, passing by Cordova and Seville, and entering the sea at a place called Barrameda. The other river, called the Segura, flows by Murcia and enters the Mediterranean near a place called Guadamar.

In this kingdom there are six great rivers, the Guadalquivir already mentioned, the Tagus which flows by Toledo and by Santarem and enters the western sea near a city they call Lisboa in the kingdom of Portugal. They call the other river Douro. It flows by Zamora, and enters the western sea near the town they call Portogallo. They call the other river Guadiana, which flows by the city of Badajos and enters the western sea at a place known as Castro Marin. The other is called the Ebro which flows by Tudela and Zaragoza, cities of the kingdom of Aragon, entering the Mediterranean by a city called Tortosa.

Know that this kingdom of Castille and Leon has all the sea coast of the west as far as Bayona the greater, and borders on Navarre and Aragon and Granada. The ensigns of the Kings of this kingdom are a flag with two castles and two lions quarterly.

I departed from the kingdom of Castille and went to the kingdom of Portugal where I found four large cities, Lisboa, Portogallo, Santarem and Braga, and three great rivers flow across it, the Tagus, Guadiana, and Douro already mentioned. This kingdom borders on the western sea and the kingdom of Castille and Leon. The arms of this kingdom are castles all round and quinas in the middle.

I departed from Portugal and went by the coast of the western sea to the province of Galicia, to the port of Bayona the less, and thence to Pontevedra, and thence to Santander, and thence to Castro Urdiales and thence to Bilbao, and thence to San Sebastian, all of which is the coast land of the King of Castille. Thence I went to Bayona the greater which is in Gascony. It is seated on the western sea, near the Pyrenean mountains. The Lord of this Bayona has for his flag white with a cross red.

I left Bayona and entered Navarre, a very rich kingdom in which there are three great cities, to wit Pamplona, Tudela and Estela. Three great rivers flow through it, the Ebro, Sinca, and Signe. The King of it has for a sign the flag as follows.

I departed from Navarre and crossed the Pyrenees which reach to the country of Ampuria, and in these mountains four great rivers have their rise. They call the first Sinca, the second Sigre, the third Giron and the fourth Ebro. On the left side of these mountains is the country of Burdeos and Limogines and Armeñaque, and Piteos and the noble city of Tolosa, where the liberal arts are studied, and the Lord of this Tolosa has for his sign a red flag with a cross of gold.

I left Tolosa and turned along the coast of the country of Burdeo, and then to Rochela, a rich city of France, and thence I went to the point of Sanmae which is in the province of Breteña, thence to the Gulf of Samalo, and thence to the province of Normandia. All these are in the kingdom of Francia, where there are many cities, towns and villages. Leaving Normandia along the coast, I came to the Gulf of Loira into which enters a great river which they call Saina which traverses the whole kingdom of France, and passes through the centre of the great city of Paris. It enters the sea in the Gulf of Loira, and from this gulf to Paris there are four days journey.

Know that the kingdom of France borders on the Mediterranean where there is a city called Narbonne, and on the Alps of Alsace and on the coasts of Flanders, and all the coasts of Gascuña to the Pyrenees. The King of France has three fleurs de lys of gold.

I left Paris and went to Roan and Chalon and thence to a city on the coast which they call Diepa in the kingdom of France, and I left it and reached a rich city called Cales which is in the province of Picardy. Know that from this Cales to the island of England is a short crossing of 8 miles. I departed from Cales and went to the country of Flanders, to a noble city which they call Brujas. The lord of that country has a flag—gold with a black lion.

Thence I went along the coast to a city which they call Solanda and thence to another called Maxa, and to another Leobec which are cities of Germany. Thence I passed to the great and rich city of Dodrec, crossing a great river which they call Rinus, having its origin in the German Alps. This river passes by Coloña, a great city of Germany. In this city they say that the three Magian Kings are interred, who worshipped Jesus Christ in Belem. But when I travelled in the empire of Cataya I was in a city called Solin and they showed me three highly revered monuments and they were in honour of the three Magian Kings who adored Jesus Christ, and they said that they were natives of that city.

In this Germany there are some very high mountains which they call the German Alps. Two rivers rise in them, one called Ruedano which flows by a city called Leon, and unites with another very large river coming from the Alps of Alsace. They flow past Lucdevic and Avinon, a city where the Pope resides, and enter the Mediterranean Sea near a city they call Arle. These cities are in the kingdom of Proença. They call the other river Rinus and it flows by the city of Coloña which I have already referred to, and enters the German Sea. The other river is called Danubio. It traverses all Germany and enters the middle of the kingdom of Ungria, forming ten large islands. (Further on I will relate how they make a great lake of sweet water, in the province of Barbaria which they call Danoye Lake, near a city called Karispona), and enters the province of Grimania near a city they call Tusna. Afterwards the Danubio enters the province of Panonia, and goes by Patania and Ebruc and Viana and Arruzvar, and afterwards enters the kingdom of Ungria and, crossing the whole of it, enters the greater sea by a city which they call Vesina. After that it forms a very large island. The Emperor of Germany has for his device a flag—yellow with a black eagle crowned.

Notes on this Chapter

This chapter covers the author's birth and the detailed description of the Kingdom of Castile and León, followed by his travels through Portugal, Galicia, Gascony, Navarre, and into southern and western France, Flanders, and parts of Germany. The text includes precise chronological markers for his birth and rich geographical detail about rivers, mountains, cities, and royal arms. The translation follows the original 1912 Hakluyt Society text as closely as possible while using clear modern English. Place names are rendered in their recognizable modern forms where identification is secure (e.g., Bayona the greater = Bayonne, Coloña = Cologne, Brujas = Bruges).