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JAN TACCOEN, A PILGRIM AND TOURIST OF THE RENAISSANCE ¹

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Abstract

This article is about the voyages undertaken by Jan Taccoen of Zillebeke, a Flemish lord, between 1500 and 1515. During that travels Taccoen reached, among other cities and countries, Rome and Venice, in Italy, Lisbon, in Portugal, and Jerusalem, in Palestine. He encountered and lived in cities and with peoples of different levels of wealth, mentalities and ways of life, of which he left us impressive memories.

Between 1500 and 1515, the noble Jan Taccoen, lord of Zillebeke's domain in West Flanders, undertook four voyages, by land and sea, in order to visit two of the main sites of Christian pilgrimage of those days, Jerusalem and Compostela. The first two failed in regards to his main goal. After traveling by land to the north of Italy, to reach Venice and from there depart by ship to Palestine, the climate of war in which this city was engulfed, first with the Turks and, later, with several European powers, did not allow him to cross the sea. Yet he had the opportunity to know, among many other lands, the first time the magnificent metropolis of the Adriatic and, on the second, Rome, the seat of Christendom, which he would describe in detail. The third journey took him to Santiago de Compostela, the great pilgrimage centre of the Iberian Peninsula. Only in his last attempt, at the age of sixty, was he able to fulfil his purpose in an expedition by sea that took him to the Holy Places of Christendom, journeying through Lisbon, Cadiz, Messina, Rhodes and other cities, of which he left us impressive memories².

Although his deepest motivation was of a religious nature, as with many other travellers of his time, his interest in meeting people, places, and customs different from those of his homeland always accompanied his wanderings, something that is quite evident in some of his surprising texts. His independence of mind, his ability not to be disturbed by aspects that could inhibit more closed up minds, the relative objectivity with which he described it, the comparisons he established between several countries and their customs, reflects much of what was characteristic to the Renaissance man. Besides that, he accompanied the descriptions and comments provided by reality with practical advices meant for future visitors of those places, particularly Flemish, not unlike a tourist promoter of our time.

At the root of the voyages of the lord of Zillebeke was, firstly, that of a believer in search of the main places of Christian worship of his time. This search constituted, since Late Antiquity, 'a path of mortification and penance required of human beings to become free of sin'³. Quantitatively, the great majority of his writings are filled with the description of churches and monasteries, of their treasures and relics, of the saint's tombs, of sacred celebrations and the indulgences that one could obtain here and there, as well as, detailed accounts of the holy places of Jerusalem and surrounding lands that he was able to visit.

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² - J. T. Van Zillebeke, *Livre de voyages de Jan Taccoen van Zillebeke (1500-1515)*; Bibliothèque Municipale de Douai (France), Mr. 793 (Transcription by Stijn Manhaeghe).

³ - Carlo Ruta, *Storia del viaggio in Sicilia dalla tarda Antiquità all'Età Moderna*, Ragusa, Edizione di Storia e Studi Sociali, 2016, p. 11.

In Lisbon, he witnessed Maundy Thursday's night procession in which close to a hundred penitents participated, with covered faces and bare torso, flagellating themselves with scourges of cord that had inside spurs of gold or silver; and so they bled abundantly, with only their flayed skin visible. These processions of flagellants, common to other regions of the Iberian Peninsula, were described in detail by João Brandão de Buarcos⁴.

The preponderance of the religious theme was natural in a time of deep Christian belief, but such descriptions also revealed, given the details they provide about the temples that he visited, a sensitivity to artistic value of many of these constructions and artwork pieces, particularly if they were of gold, silver, and precious stones. His admiration for St. Mark's Venetian basilica and for the churches of Rome, for instance St. Peter, gives abundant proof of the wonderment they imprinted on him.

In the first, he was astonished by the floors and their mosaics of various sizes and colours, mostly composed of small stones and 'richly worked in the shapes of chess, animals, birds and flowers', which were a manifestation of secular oriental influence in Venetian art⁵. In the same way, he was fascinated in Jerusalem with the Omar mosque, which he thought was the Solomon temple, and where he and his companions were not able to enter since they were Christians: 'Therefore, we saw the temple from afar, which is the most marvellous thing we have ever seen, of silver, gold, and blue.'

Such an attitude, however, was also extended to civil buildings as the Doge's palace in Venice, of whose magnificence he left testimony, including the Lordship's treasury to which he referred in detail. Likewise, to the numerous castles that he saw during his journeys, namely in Germany, of which he never forgot to mention, as it was expected from a member of the nobility. The same can be said of the cities' fortifications, such as those of Rhodes Island, which he greatly exalted and which were still being reinforced when he passed there in 1514; and of the strongholds he visited, like the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, with their copious weaponry. Ulm, in Germany was surrounded by three walls. As for other cities, he noticed that they had no defensive walls, the oldest urban symbol⁶, such as Venice, which had no walls or doors and could be entered from all sides, or Milan, whose ditches could be transposed with the aid of a pike. In others, the gates were not closed, as was the case of Lisbon where they were not prepared for this, even though Portugal was a warrior country and had, supposedly, many enemies. In Milan, however, it did not go unnoticed to him a quite large, strong and beautiful castle, the largest he had ever seen. It was the castle built in the middle of the 15th century by Francesco Sforza, the future Duke, and which was continued by his successors.

The ruins of the Roman Empire's constructions in the papal city also impressed him and he noted them down, example of it are parts of the ancient wall, the Colosseum, the columns and monumental statues that locals and visitors were continuously encountering. During his stay he witnessed the discovery, in a street near St. John Lateran, of three large still intact terracotta jugs. Ancient Rome's artistic remains were a decisive factor in the interest of Italian intellectuals for Antiquity and for the very art of the Renaissance. The popes also participated in this movement for the study and defence of these remains of the city's glorious past. A 1462 edict prohibited the degradation of the ancient monuments. Sixtus IV (1471-1484), Alexander VI (1492-1503) and Julius II (1503-1513) encouraged archaeological excavations and, the first and the last, founded museums to exhibit many of the discovered sculptures and pieces⁷.

The curiosity of the tourist for new things that he was coming to know is evident in all these cases, not unlike what happens in our time and which can change according to each person's formation and interests. The cities he visited, especially the most important ones, received the traveller's attentive observation, who classified and described them in size, population or aesthetic value and, in some cases, compared them to Bruges and Antwerp, which he knew well and were able to be easily used for comparison. He referred to the capital of Tuscany, in Italy, as 'the beautiful city of Florence' and 'Florence, the Beautiful', to Milan as 'a very large city, full of houses and highly populated (...) of great commerce and where people work on all the trades' and to Naples as 'a highly populated city, commercially rich and strong, with a beautiful and big castle on the sea and a beautiful bay'.

⁴ - João Brandão de Buarcos, "Majestade e grandezas de Lisboa em 1552", *Arquivo Histórico Português*, v. XI, Lisboa, 1916, pp. 115-116.

⁵ - Frederic C. Lane, *Venise, une republique maritime*, Paris, Flammarion, 1985, p. 285.

⁶ - Élisabeth Crouset-Pavan, «*Sopra le acque salse*». *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Âge*, v. I, Roma, École Française de Rome, 1992, p. 61.

⁷ - Jean Delumeau, *A civilização do Renascimento*, v. I, Lisboa, Estampa, 1983, p. 99-100.

Rhodes only impressed him due to its defensive ability, since he considered it neither too big nor beautiful, but instead ‘astonishingly strong’; which, in truth, would not prevent it from being conquered by the Turks in 1522, only eight years after Taccoen’s visit.

The comparison with Bruges and other Flemish cities was recurrent in his texts. About Venice, he considered it to be ‘a very beautiful and the richest city in Christendom and, apparently, larger than Bruges, in Flanders’, and regarding Lisbon, it was ‘as large as Bruges, but lacking most of its beauty.’ As for the German Augsburg, he thought it ‘a very beautiful and quite big city, like Antwerp, in Brabant.’ Other times he placed alongside buildings or events. Our Lady of Loreto church, in Italy, seemed to him ‘a big and beautiful church, completely new, castle-shaped, surrounded by round towers facing outwards, as in Comines castle’, his own residence. About the Rialto square, in Venice, he said that it was ‘the main square where business was done and people from all nations would gather, Turks and Jews alongside with Christians, as in Bruges Bourse.’

This last designation took the name of the *Hôtel des Bourses*, the name of the family that built it in the Flemish city, and which became the meeting place of bankers, brokers and traders from many other cities⁸. Lisbon’s churches, in his opinion, were worthless in the sight of those of his own country. And when describing the procession that, every two years, crossed Rome’s streets each Thursday preceding Lent, in front of the pope and the cardinals, and which took three hours to go by, he concluded that, compared to it, what took place in Ghent at the same time had none of its richness. He also considered that in Lisbon no one attired for the feast, whether men or women, as was done in Rome, Venice, or Milan, because he had spent the entire Easter season there and had seen nothing festive.

Certain characteristics of some of the cities’ urbanism and location were also addressed. Trento had been raised between two mountains and had a beautiful Episcopal palace. About Venice he said that the main streets were made ‘of water’, because the whole city stood on the sea, and circulation was made by boat. Inside it you walked in narrow streets and bridges. Given this, there was not any land or fresh water in the city, except for the fresh water from the rain and that which was carried into it, and which was kept in cisterns. The same was true for the horses, which had to be taken by boat. The omnipresence of the liquid element highlighted by all the chroniclers who wrote about the city, built on islets separated by the waters⁹. However, for Taccoen, the city had truly beautiful houses, richly built in marble, besides 250 churches. All the constructions were of stone.

Naples had high stone houses, but narrow and poorly paved streets. The same happened in Lisbon. According to him, in 1514 there was only a single good, well-paved street in the city (Nova Street, which he did not name, certainly, because he did not remember). The population lived in buildings of three and four floors, each with a different family. This was the consequence of the city’s great growth in recent decades due to trade, which, in his view, would make it a large, rich and powerful city in the future. Such prediction would fulfil itself, for by the end of the century the Tagus’ city would be among the ten most populous in Europe¹⁰. He also mentioned the new and important constructions promoted by King Manuel I: the new royal palace by the river, and the All Saints Hospital, whose works were underway.

He wrote of Jerusalem that it must have been ‘a beautiful and large city, all of white stone, but had been allowed to decay. The sultan had ordered that nothing new was to be built in the city, and so, everything, then, was greatly degraded’. The streets were narrow and unpaved, although it was clear they had once been, as it was possible to confirm in some places. Bethlehem, which also seemed to him to have had been a great city, gave him a similar impression of decadence. The church was beautiful and rich, the most beautiful they saw in the Holy Land, with 44 white marble pillars and with marble walls; but it was empty and uncared for, since no one lived there.

The weather conditions and other natural features have not failed to grasp Jan Taccoen’s attention, appearing in some of his narrations. During his first trip to Italy, in 1500, when he and his companions were already returning, as they passed by St. Bernard Mountain, in the Alps, the snow was such they were not able to continue with their journey until the road was reopened. In Cadiz, where he was from May to July 1514, ‘it was very hot (...) since from May onwards all the plants became dry and burned, like hay. And it stays like that until Christmas, when it starts to go green again, as happens in our country in May’.

⁸ - Fernand Braudel, *Civilização material, economia e capitalismo, Séculos XV-XVIII. Tomo 2. Os Jogos das trocas*, Lisboa, Teorema, 1992, p. 78.

⁹ - Élisabeth Crouset-Pavan, Op. cit. , p. 66.

¹⁰ - Teresa Ferreira Rodrigues, *História da população portuguesa*, Porto, Afrontamento, 2008, p. 162.

Although the dryness did not extend until very late, instead only until the first autumn rains, the traveller showed to have strongly felt the weather differences between Southern and Northern Europe. Still even worse must he have found the Holy Land's natural conditions, for he referred to the region of Jerusalem as 'a poor country, hot and without trees'.

On the journey from Majorca to Sicily, on the way to Palestine, he saw the island of Vulcan, one of the Aeolis, whose volcano was steaming intensely and, at night, sent flames with sparks of incandescent stones. As he heard, there stood hell's entrance. The identification of Sicily, land of volcanoes, with hellish landscapes dates back to the first centuries of the Christian era and was based on superstitious beliefs about the volcanoes threatening presence, such as Etna and Vulcan (named after the Roman god of fire), whose craters were believed to be infested with demons and igneous manifestations associated with Evil. These beliefs continued to be disseminated in the Late Middle Ages in the writings of several writers¹¹.

Taccoen knew the dangers of the sea, either through storms that knock down the ships on which he travelled, or by news that came to him from maritime accidents. During the return, by sea, from his second journey to Italy, after passing by Lisbon's shores, a great storm threatened his life and the life of his companions by filling their boat, which was full of potassium alum, with water making the chests float, which took the crew to kneel and shout in loud cries: *Mercy!* This situation would repeated itself on the French coast.

In 1514, during the journey that, finally, took him to the Holy Land, an especially dramatic experience took place when the small fleet in which he went was devastated by a strong storm near the coast of Galicia. One of the three ships that were travelling together, the *Mékiel* of Antwerp, sank and the passengers and crew had to be saved and collected by the others vessels. Shortly before, in the English Channel, they had encountered a mast and hull of a wrecked ship that, as they were told, was taking pilgrims, who had all drowned, to Santiago de Compostela. Still on the same journey but already in front of Ibiza, in the Balearics, another storm prevented them from disembarking. Already in Palestine, as they were preparing to return, the ship they had anchored at Jaffa was almost destroyed by a great storm, leaving it without masts and with the pilgrims' possessions squandered. Only again in Rhodes, to where they travelled, with great danger, using oars could everything be rebuilt. Even so, until they docked in Italy, at the end of December, they would still suffer three more attacks from the natural elements.

In addition to these incidents, the food conditions on the ships were not good for the passengers with fewer resources. During the journey to Jerusalem twelve pilgrims died, ten men and two women, something Taccoen attributed to the great hunger and thirst that existed.

In spite of these negative experiences, probably understood by Jan Taccoen and the other pilgrims as inherent to the difficult journey that they had begun and wished to fulfil until the end, as proof of the sacrifice required to achieve beatitude, the contact with the sea would not leave only with bad memories on him. Near the Cape St. Vincent, in Portugal, he saw a large number of 'fish' of notable size called *tonijn* (porpoises), a type of small dolphins, and in Cadiz, where he arrived at the end of May 1514, he saw and ate tunas, fished in the beginning of that month, smashed and then salted, just as he said was done in Dunkirk and Nieuwpoort. He considered them the size of human beings and very tasty. On the shores of the ancient Islamic kingdom of Granada he sighted whales emerging from the water, and thought them as big as two horses.

Jan from Zillebeke was equally interested in the landscapes that he saw, as in Lisbon, whose bay impressed him due to its vastness and of which he was told was the most beautiful in all Christendom. Also about the agricultural practices encountered along the way, such as the olive, orange and pomegranate groves in Florence, the vineyards in the duchy of Milan, the walnut trees in Southern Italy, whose nuts he noticed had twice the size of those from his homeland and the inhabitants allowed the vines to climb the trees, especially the poplars. The wines of Puerto de Santa Maria and of Jerez were good and sweet, and very cheap. Wine, like wheat, was once again highlighted in Sicily, where they were abundant. A particularly gratifying route must have been the one he and his companions took in 1500, by boat on the Rhine, between Cologne and Mainz. The traveller mentions numerous small towns on both riverbanks, with their castles on top of high cliffs, as well as, the landscapes with vineyards and high mountains. It was also one of the journeys that most amazed the Andalusian Pero Tafur in 1438 when he passed there, although in the opposite direction: 'This is, truly, the most beautiful thing to see in the world, the valley of the Rhine'¹².

¹¹ - Carlo Ruta, Op. cit., pp. 27-28 e 85.

¹² - Pedro Martínez García, «*Andanças e viagens: el outro Pero Tafur*», *Edad Media. Revista de Historia*, 11, 2010, p. 269 [Available in <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3220028.pdf>] Accessed 4.1.2018.

Among the nature resources were the metal mines, like the Tyrol silver mines which he passed by, and the salt that was produced near Salins, in Burgundy county, by boiling the salt water that was extracted there. Taccoen described the process of obtaining salt, its subsequent transformation, by drying, into blocks like sugar breads, which were then dispatched in cars to other countries. Other industries caught his touristic curiosity, such as a wood sawing mill on the way to Esslingen, and the weaving and manufacturing of velvet, apricot and satin cloths of various colours in Trento, to which he attended.

He always remarked enthusiastically about fairs, markets, and trade in general, as well as industry. At the fish market in Rome hares, partridges, pheasants and all kinds of game, as well as deer, male and female, and hedgehogs, were sold daily in such quantities that amazed him. One could also have cheap pork since hunting was allowed. Concerning Nova Street, in Lisbon, he pointed out that you could see all kinds of trades and goods and, about Venice, that there were all sorts of products and could find incomparable wealth.

In Venice, besides the Rialto square, already mentioned, he saw the house of the Germans (*Fondaco dei Tedeschi*), belonging to the Lordship, where the Germans had residence and centralized their businesses, and that yielded to the republic one hundred ducats of gold every day. The French also had their house. At the Venetian Arsenal, 'perhaps the largest industrial complex of medieval Europe'¹³, galleys, rigging, sails and all the navigational equipment were constructed, as well as the artillery, and there worked a great amount of workers. While passing through Messina, in Sicily, he saw a beautiful free trade fair, with all sorts of products, which took place outside the walls, by the sea and lasted for eight days. On several occasions he listed the coins used in the countries in which he stayed, with their equivalences in the currencies known in his homeland, as he did in Rome and in Lisbon. In this regard, he emphasized, while in the Church's capital, Pope Julius II creation of a new gold coin, the *Julius*, worth two ducats.

For this reason, and despite being a nobleman, holder of domains, he valued goods and was drawn to business. In Rome, while he was preparing to return to his motherland, he traded fabrics and carpets that had arrived from Flanders, advised by acquainted bankers. During his journey to Lisbon in 1514, seeing one of the ships of the fleet he was part of shipwrecking, he lamented the lost merchandise, since the ship was 'carrying all kinds of products from Antwerp and Bruges, to unload in Lisbon, and those goods of incalculable value have been lost!' One of his sons, Wulfaart, lived in Lisbon at that time, where he probably engaged in trade, the main cause of attraction for foreigners. Regarding Jerez, he left his compatriots instructions concerning the quality and price of the wines produced, in case they would want to travel there and trade.

Taccoen's personality reveals, in this regard, the transformations enacted by the commercial development of late 14th and early 15th centuries in the European landowning nobility, instilling, on the side of the traditional religious and knightly values, traces of a mercantile and 'modern' mentality.

In Mediterranean societies an intense use of slaves existed since antiquity, having such workforce different origins and physical traits, being either African blacks or whites from the shores of the Black Sea or the Balkans¹⁴. Taccoen must have seen plenty in Venice, mentioning that its inhabitants possessed 'multiple slaves, which they had purchased, both male and female, who took over the domestic activities, went to the market and fetched water from the cisterns when it rained'. Nevertheless, he would find much more in Lisbon. Slave trade had increased with the Portuguese travels along the African continent in the 15th century, and Lisbon had become the main entry port of slaves in the country and the Iberian Peninsula. While in the city, in the spring of 1514, he witnessed the arrival of a ship, probably coming from the shores of Guinea, transporting spices and 300 slaves, man, women, teenagers and children. The description he made of them, of their unloading and selling to buyers is quite rare in the history of slavery in the country. They were disembarked completely nude, because, according to him, they 'did not show observance to any law, faith or shame'. When they left the ship, he saw them, kneeling on the floor, eating porridge from inside large plates, and afterwards drinking in that same position, 'like animals'. He saw, later on, the buyers examining their mouths to see the teeth, and making the men and the boys run. When sellers and buyers reached an agreement, the later placed a cloth around their waist and took them home. The Florentine Filippo Sassetti also narrated, in the second half of 1500, the selling of the captives that reached the city¹⁵.

¹³ - D.S. Chambers, *Veneza imperial. 1380-1580*, Lisboa, Verbo, 1972, p. 36.

¹⁴ - Jacques Heers, *Escravos e servidão doméstica na Idade Média*, Lisboa, Dom Quixote, 1983, pp. 71-75.

¹⁵ - Filippo Sassetti, *Lettere di ... sopra i suoi viaggi nelle Indie Orientali dal 1578 al 1588*, Reggio, Dalla Stamperia Torregiani & C., 1844, pp. 26-27.

With the arrival of countless African slaves, the population had become multiracial and multi-ethnic. The lord of Zillebeke thought that in Lisbon lived ‘so many Moors, whites and blacks’, as the rest of individuals, due to the conquests of the kings of Portugal. Besides humans, he also saw strange animals brought from outside. Among them, he pointed out three elephants of the king, which he saw walking down the street. They were ‘big and ugly animals, grey-skinned, furless,’ but of great ability and intelligence and quite harmless. He described them in detail, as well as, their treatment and feeding by the handlers, Indian slaves who had accompanied them since their lands of origin. He said that when they stood before the king, they bowed in a sign of reverence. These and other elephants, who participated in the parades in which the monarch was present, remained in the royal service until the end of the dynasty, already in the second half of the century¹⁶.

He also highlighted the thermal springs of Padua region, in Italy, where he and his companions bathed in natural warm water adjusted with cold water, in a tank where a hundred people could fit. There were workers to help the bathers and rooms for them to rest at the end of the treatments.

His curiosity as a watchful man towards what he encountered did not fail to mention some institutions, either of education, such as the University of Padua, ‘very beautiful and with many students from different countries’, or of aid, such as Santiago de Compostela’s hospital, which he saw in 1512, on his third voyage. Because it was a Holy Year (commemorating the legendary discovery of the Apostle’s tomb in 812), with a large influx of pilgrims, there was scarcely any place in the city’s inns, and it was necessary to stay in the houses of the inhabitants, artisans and poor people. Even so, he managed to stay at the Three Pigeons guesthouse, whose innkeeper and servants were from Flanders and cooked in his country’s fashion. The hospital also had a place for 700 people, accommodated according to their status, national origin and sex. He described it as unparalleled in wealth and magnitude, with two floors and all made of grey stone. He referred to the magnificent chapel, the apothecary, and the several infirmaries for all sorts of patients, as well as the private quarters of the king and queen.

Many of the inns where he was accommodated in his several trips were mentioned, with their names; particularly at the start of the first one, still in Flanders and Germany. They had names like the Good Angel, the Deer, the Horn, the Sword, the Hawk and the Fleur-de-lis. Above all, it did not go unmentioned their belonging to his compatriots, as in the case previously described. The same happened in Lisbon, in 1514, when he was in the inn of a native of Bruges, Gilles de Backere, who had manufactured casks in his homeland and had become a merchant there. They used golden and silver tableware, the room was covered with tapestries, and the innkeeper, supposedly his wife, on Easter days, when Taccoen stayed there, wore gold bracelets on her arms and seven or eight rings on her fingers, one of them of great value. In Cadiz, he met three Flemish inns, one of Jacques de Domme, from Bruges, the one of the widow Barbele and the one of an individual named Neelkin. At Puerto de Santa Maria, a nearby town, he lodged in the inn of the German Temendo Bertran. When he was in Cadiz, waiting for the passage of the pilgrim’s ship to Jerusalem, an acquaintance established at Jerez, three miles from there, named Nicolas de Renijcke, who also owned an inn, knowing of his presence, invited him to meet him, and he ended up staying there for a month. His wife was from Courtray. From that locality, he complimented especially the wines, good and cheap, as was said.

In Rome, according to him, there were two inns for the French, the White Cross and the Star, and three for the Germans and Flemish: the Golden Head, the Golden Lion and the Angel. Along the routes by land, he was always mentioning the distances between the most important locations and where toll was paid.

The interest with respect of his own country was equally observed in other types of places. In Lisbon, he visited the convent of São Domingos, where the Flemish community had a chapel in honour of Saint Andrew. It was covered with tapestries with Flanders’ coat of arms, the Black Lion. He heard that the ornaments were estimated at two thousand *escudos*, and there he saw rich jewels. The chapel had a metal railing and, in front, a tomb to bury the members of that community. According to Friar Luís de Sousa, the chapel was kept by the Flemish merchants with a thousandth of what they earned in their business and one *vintem*¹⁷ for each ton carried by their ships. The same writer praised the assistance of the fellowship in favour of the deprived Flemish and in those who arrived ill to the port of the city¹⁸. A tolerant and impartial attitude towards religions, other than the Christianity or to diverse Roman rites, is revealed by his desire to attend Jewish and Greek Orthodox Church ceremonies.

¹⁶ - Jorge Fonseca, *Escravos e senhores na Lisboa quinhentista*, Lisboa, Colibri, 2010, pp. 258-261.

¹⁷ Translator’s Note: a silver coin, worth a twentieth of a *Real*, and comparable to a silver penny.

¹⁸ - Frei Luís de Sousa, *História de São Domingos* (1623), v. I, Porto, Lello & Irmão, 1977, pp. 362-363.

In this case, it was in Venice that the group of pilgrims told the priests of that church of their interest to hear them sing, witnessing for that a religious ritual in which the celebrant blessed white bread soups placed on a plate, which he then offered to the attending believers. The only manifestation of strangeness from the observer is that the mass seemed to them very different from what they knew and that he and his companions understood nothing of what was said, which was predictable.

Still on the surroundings of the same city, in Mestre, he went on a Saturday with a group of Frenchmen to watch the arrival of the Jews at the local synagogue, also hoping to be able to observe the ceremony as much as possible 'to see what they were going to do there'. Our traveller thought that the women wore luxuriously dressed and found 'there jewish women of such beauty that it was a misfortune they were not Christians.'

The men wore long black robes and had small round caps on their heads. Inside were benches around the room and a tabernacle like an altar, with men sitting on benches and women in a place above that, from where they could see the priest. They saw two priests aged 14 or 15 singing from a large book with letters so big that they were marvelled and with voices so clear and beautiful that it was a joy to hear them, to which the men who were there responded as if saying: - Amen. The priest, in turn, also sang. Since nothing they heard was in Latin, they did not understand a single word. Then the priest unrolled, from inside a large baton he had brought, a parchment scroll written with large letters, showed it to the crowd, and everyone knelt down, clapping their hands and crying out something the observers did not understand. Then the priest rolled up the parchment that they were told was the Old Testament, in which they believed. It should be noted the interest in Jewish practices by believers of a different and competing faith to Judaism, as well as the objectivity in its description, unthinkable in other European countries where the Jewish religion was forbidden and its followers persecuted and considered the personification of Evil itself. It was the attitude an era as the Renaissance, in which 'the comprehensive study of other religions was no longer forbidden'¹⁹. Many Jews had concentrated themselves in Mestre, who, a few years later, due to the wars in the region would eventually take refuge in Venice, giving rise in 1516 to the *Ghetto Nuovo*²⁰.

This curiosity and attraction for the unknown was also shown when they were able to observe representatives of people of opposing civilizations, in the religious and political sphere. While in Venice they saw the arrival of two ambassadors from the Turkish empire, whom Tacoen described as being, the first, 'an old man with a long beard, rich and strangely dressed' and, the other, 'a young man without beard, with fine cloths around his head and rich stones and pearls on a velvet coat with gold buttons and a robe of fine gold'.

Being an aristocrat, he was interested in demonstrations of royal or princely grandeur, not hesitating to mention all the occasions when he saw, from near or afar, monarchs with their respective delegations. In 1500, when he passed through Augsburg, an imperial city, 'the King and Queen of the Romans' were there, whom he saw with the other pilgrims, with the 'four Electors', forming 'a beautiful delegation, all armed.' Maximilian I was to be emperor only in 1508, succeeding his father Frederick III, deceased in 1493. In 1494 he married, a second time, with Bianca Maria Sforza, daughter of the Duke of Milan. They were the royal couple that the Flemish travellers surprised in the German city. Years later, on his return from his last voyage in March 1515, Tacoen was able to reach Ghent still 'in time to see Duke Philip make his entrance'. In fact, it was Charles, future emperor of the Holy Empire. He was the son of Philip, the Fair, who died in 1506. He had been declared of age that same year and began to rule Flanders.

In 1509, when he arrived in Milan, he saw 'the king of France and all his nobles, and all the men of arms passing there, in great ostentation.' In the city, everyone bought harnesses, feathers, velvets, gold chains, and fabrics also of gold, velvet and silk. 'The ladies of the city paraded themselves during this time as much as possible.' The army of the French monarch Louis XII entered Italy under the treaty of Cambrai of December of the previous year, signed with the emperor and other powers, with the support of the Holy See. Officially, it was aimed at war with the Turks, but a secret agreement anticipated the retaking from Venice of the pope's territories that it had captured. The campaign began on April 1, 1509. Tacoen and his companions had departed on March 10 from Flanders, heading first to Paris and going then to Italy with the French troops, for security reasons. When, on his first journey to Italy in 1500, he passed by Pesaro, he saw the Count, who seemed to him 'a handsome dark-haired man with a long black beard' who had married the Pope's daughter, who then her father forced to marry the 'bastard of Naples'. He had built a strong castle by the sea, 'to defend himself against the pope and those who might threaten him.' It was Giovanni Sforza, who had married Lucrezia Borgia, the daughter of Pope Alexander VI.

¹⁹ - J. R. Hale, *A Europa durante o Renascimento. 1480-1520*, Lisboa Presença, 1983, p. 243.

²⁰ - Frederic C. Lane, Op. cit., p. 402.

However, her father cancelled the marriage and married Lucrezia to Alfonso of Aragon, the illegitimate son of Alfonso II, king of Naples, who was to be murdered by his brother-in-law Cesare Borgia. After the divorce, Sforza fled from Rome, fearing the Pope and the son, and fortified himself in his dominion, from where he was expelled by Caesar in 1500, the year when Taccoen passed through Italy. He was to recover his condition in 1503, after the pope's death and the son's estrangement. In Lisbon, he was able to observe King Manuel I and Queen Maria, his second wife. His description does not depart much from what is known from other sources.

While the chronicler Damião de Góis stated that the monarch was 'of good stature'²¹, which we can be attributed to a benevolent attitude on behalf of the official chronicler, although 'of a more delicate body than thick', Taccoen considered him 'a small and thin man', an impression that may have been due to his origin from a country whose inhabitants were taller than the Iberian populations. Of the Queen he said she was 'a beautiful woman, but with a very small nose'. He also witnessed a meal taken by the sovereign, for, as he noted, anyone who wished to attend dinner or supper with the king was able to, which certainly applied only to the nobility and to visitors of higher status. According to his account, D. Manuel sat alone in the middle of the table. After washing their hands, five priests blessed the meal and gave thanks to God. Five servants, acting as carvers and carrying out similar tasks, served the monarch. Some of the pages, beside him, kept the flies away from the table. He drank nothing but water, which might be a preference of taste or a way to provide an example of sobriety. The covered meats were uncovered and presented to the king for him to consume them. He also said that there were many people around the table and that no one did anything to keep them away, which was clearly purposeful and was part of the ceremonial display of royal power, before foreign subjects and visitors. Another description, regarding his predecessor Dom John II, made by the Polish Nicolaus Popplau in 1484, shows a similar ceremonial²².

The sovereigns he most often saw and whose magnificence he described in more detail were, however, the popes. In 1500, a few days after arriving in Rome, he saw Alexander VI blessing and giving general absolution to the faithful. After that, he saw him again at other times. The same happened on the second trip with Pope Julius II. As he remained for seven months at Christendom's headquarters (nine months with an interruption of two to travel through southern Italy), he had the opportunity to see the pontiff on numerous occasions, both in religious acts and in processions and other festive events. The impression he got was always of luxury and wealth. Once he saw him at Ostia, the port of Rome, where he had built a castle for his recreation. Julius II was walking along the Tiber, accompanied by two cardinals and their halberdiers. He was then carried on his throne 'of gold cloth, with stones and pendant pearls'. He wore apricot and velvet clothes and had many rings on his fingers. In the river was a galley with 60 rowers who shouted in chorus as the pope passed: '*Julius, Julius, Deus in terra et in mare, misericordia, misericordia!*' Then the pope gave them his blessing.

The processions that formed to accompany the Pope to some of Rome's churches at festive times included hundreds of military men on horseback, dozens of cardinals and bishops, all the pope and the city's officers luxuriously dressed, accompanied by trumpets.

Described in detail, were also the countless celebrations that took place in the papal city from Kings Day onwards, in the weeks before Lent, in which the whole population took part. Those moments of decompression and joy, compensation for the seclusion and privations that awaited, had their roots in traditions that, in some cases, went back to ancient Rome and had evolved throughout the Middle Ages²³. They had the pope's approval, who witnessed them with cardinals and bishops from windows of the palace. They were mainly races aiming at winning trophies of luxurious fabrics: races of masked, of old men, of young artisans and of Jews. For the people, they were partly an amusement given the mockery of some social groups, having even selected prostitutes or humpback and misshapen men to incorporate them. Although the Jews had to participate in this humiliating experience (one of the counterparts for the protection they enjoyed in the city), it was up to them to pay for most of the festivities²⁴. Every two years, the Thursday before Lent was celebrated with an exceptional parade that took three hours to pass and included hundreds of knights in rich costumes and armours, and groups of extras with representations alluding to events of Roman history, in which the authorities and the city aristocrats were incorporated. The following days, until Ash Wednesday, were occupied with daily events: donkey, bull and buffalo competitions, duck courses and knights tournaments.

²¹ - João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *D. Manuel I (1469-1521), um príncipe do Renascimento*, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 2005, p. 58.

²² - J. Garcia Mercadal (Org.), *Viajes de extranjeros por España y Portugal*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1952, p. 314

²³ - Louis Molet, «O ano religioso, a festa e os ritmos do tempo», *História dos costumes* (Dir. Jean Poirier), V. 1, Lisboa, Estampa, 1998, pp. 221-227.

²⁴ - Jacques Heers, *Festas de loucos e carnavais*, Lisboa, Dom Quixote, 1987, p. 199.

The duck courses, where knights sought to reach with the sword ducks hanging on a rope, were also used in Portugal, at celebrations promoted in Vila Viçosa by slaves and blacks devotees of the Rosary, with the patronage of the Dukes of Braganza²⁵. Likewise in Seville, still in the 18th century, by the Blacks Brotherhood²⁶.

The description of customs and behaviours of the inhabitants of several cities and countries and the comparison between them is one of the most interesting aspects of Jan Taccoen's travel memories. They refer to the dressing habits, but also the moral and judicial reactions towards infractions. Let us start with the first ones.

Of the Venice's inhabitants and, in general, of the Italians, might they be gentlemen, bourgeois or others, he said they were 'beautiful, dark-haired and of noble figure', and regarding clothing and living conditions, they wore dark, violet or scarlet clothing, until the feet, with broad sleeves in the middle and narrow near the hands. The women and maidens dressed in a simple and strange way, with robes without any beauty. In fact, they were never seen in the streets or in windows; they only went out on days of festivities, weddings and to go to church. There they wore dresses of silk and gold, with props, wearing shoes so high they only enabled them to walk very slowly, with small steps. These were one and two-heeled shoes²⁷. They were, in his opinion, large and bad-looking women. The marriageable daughters walked in front in them, but their faces were not seen, since they had a thin dark veil over them, not permitting to know whether they were beautiful or not. The married women went with their faces and chest uncovered, their long hair full of stones and pearls, and their neck with gold necklaces. When they arrived at the church, they looked around to see if they were being watched.

While in Rome, he witnessed a New Year's ceremony at the church of Araceli. Yearly the newly married upper class women and those expecting to marry, aged 10 or 12, came there luxuriously dressed with textiles of gold, satin, brocade and velvet fabrics, and on their heads caps covered with pearls hanging over their hair, with rich jewels around the neck and rings on their fingers. They walked, as the Venetian, with very high-heeled shoes, the espoused in front and her mother and the other relatives behind, dressed simply in black with a veil on their heads. A year after their marriage they no longer displayed any luxury, except at weddings and holidays. Ordinary women wore silk and velvet dresses daily, as well as gold necklaces. Taccoen, however, was not attracted to the Roman women, since he thought that the most beautiful women in the city were those from Spain, France, and Germany.

He also left us some thoughts of the garments of Lisbon's residents. The men of high status walked on mules in the street, wearing camlet coats covered by long cloaks almost to the ground with their arms out. The ladies wore several dresses up to their waist and, above them, velvets and silks. They also wore silver or gold bracelets and rings on their fingers. However, in the streets none of this was visible because they wore a cloak over their clothes and a veil over their heads.

On the moral level, especially regarding the relations between the sexes, the Flemish traveller gave three examples, two of which he developed in detail, Rome and Lisbon. Of these, the more liberal system, by far, was the Roman. According to him, virgin girls were rare except in the richer classes. Among the majority, it was very common for men and women to have relations with one another, and the richest had three or four friends, whether married or not. They were not subject of the slightest censure and no one considered it a sin.

It was said that if anyone, in his country, was tired of his spouse he could go to Rome to be devoted to licentiousness in the form that he liked best. Therefore, a woman who had a beautiful daughter or several, earned a living at home, where they could be found, without the mother having to do anything else. He also said that a woman usually had three lovers: one of them paid the room, the other the clothes and the third the other expenses, and they lived happily with each other. Some of these men were not with their wives but once a week or less. When they had children, the daughters stayed with the mothers and the sons, when they grew up, with the fathers. When both parents grew old, they all moved together. Later in the account of his last voyage, when referring to Lisbon and comparing the Portuguese customs with those of Rome, he stated that it was obvious that the pope consented to all that. It ended with a common assertion, that the cardinals triumphed in Rome, the women showed off, and all exploited the donkeys, for the cardinals lacked nothing, the women did not suffer any subjection and only the poor donkeys carried everything to the City.

²⁵ - António de Oliveira de Cadornega, *Descrição da muito populosa e sempre leal Vila Viçosa* (1683), Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1982, pp. 28-29.

²⁶ - Isidoro Moreno, *La antigua hermandad de los Negros de Sevilla*, Sevilla, Universidad, 1997, pp. 171-173.

²⁷ - François Boucher, *Histoire du costume en Occident de l'Antiquité a nos jours*, Paris, Flammarion, 1965, p. 230.

Taccoen's view of the Roman women's behaviour concerned to the so-called 'courtesans' who lived by renting the body to the male high class population, in which were included the higher clergy, the aristocrats, and high status foreigners. Beneath them were the simple, street or brothel, prostitutes, estimated to be 6,800 in year 1490²⁸. As for the former, the freedom and luxurious life they enjoyed was consequence both of the social characteristics of the city, as well as, of the culture in vogue in Renaissance Italy, which had eroticism as one of its most striking features²⁹. The anonymous Portuguese nobleman, who remained at Christendom's headquarters at the service of the Duke of Braganza almost at the same time as Jan Taccoen, corroborated the entirety of the traveller comments: 'And that is why Rome is the head of the world cities. That which in other places would be greatly odd and taken as dishonest, is there taken as gentleness, praise, honour, and nobility of the court. (...) Women do not stay spinning at the distaff, I mean, the courtesans. It is a wonder to see the multitude of them and the expenses that are made with them'³⁰.

In regards with this issue, what was happening in Portugal was quite different. Whenever a married woman became involved with another man and her husband denounced her, the two lovers were hanged, a reality that Taccoen repeatedly witnessed while staying in Lisbon. More, if the offended husband killed the adulteress he would suffer nothing, as he equally witnessed when he saw an apparently wealthy and powerful man who had killed days earlier his wife and her complicit passing by him. The kingdom's laws allowed this³¹. In relation to Jerez, in Andalusia, a situation he addressed more briefly, the rules in force were the same as in Portugal.

One of main objectives of the Lord of Zillebeke in the journey to Jerusalem and in the two unsuccessful previous attempts was his accession to the rank of knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, in whose church the ceremonies were to take place. It was the whole journey's culmination and the prize for the sacrifices he, and the other pilgrims, had faced. Dangers at sea, drastic climate differences, discomfort and humiliation in Palestine, enemy territory where they were treated as infidels, great expenses, all would be rewarded with the acquisition of that honour, which represented the fulfilment of a merciful intent, but also a reinforcement of nobility. The church of the Holy Sepulchre was built in the fourth century by the Roman emperor Constantine, where, according to tradition, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ occurred. After its destruction in a fire, it was rebuilt by the Byzantine, destroyed again by the Muslims in the 11th century, and rebuilt in that century yet again by the Byzantine. For the solemn act the candidates had already registered previously and, on the appointed day, at night, all went to the church, where Franciscan Francesco Suriano³², guardian of the Holy Sepulchre, invested them before the Christ's tomb. The pilgrims had already visited the temple days before. Taccoen described it, mentioning the seven Christian communities that shared responsibilities in its conservation and worship, each with separated places³³. Such coexistence was in place since the 14th century.

The set of travel accounts ends with a long list of advices to his compatriots that were to be future pilgrims. In it the author showed a practical sense and a solidarity towards those would venture in the same enterprise. It is kind of a testimonial of an experienced traveller, something a man of 60 years of age wanted to bequeath to the coming ones. He addresses a large number of issues, from the money and servants they should take with them, the kind of contract that they should make with the ship's master, the objects he advises each to have in the cabin (food and hygiene items and 'time-passing' books), to the tips they should distribute on board, and how to get the gifts the acquaintances expected them to bring. Also, how they should behave toward the locals in Jerusalem, particularly with the owners of the donkeys in which they would ride, how they could prevent the lack of food awaiting them, the importance of not having nor drinking wine, because it was forbidden, and many other practical recommendations.

²⁸ - J. R. Hale, Op. cit., p. 110.

²⁹ - Jean Delumeau, *A civilização do Renascimento*, v. II, Lisboa, Estampa, 1984, p. 99-101.

³⁰ - Paulo Lopes, *Um agente português na Roma do Renascimento. Sociedade, quotidiano e poder num manuscrito inédito do século XVI*, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores e Temas e Debates, 2013, p. 734.

³¹ - *Ordenações afonsinas*, 2^a. Edição, Liv. 5, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1999, pp. 44 e 56-57; *Ordenações manuelinas*, Liv. 5, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1984, pp. 54-55 e 59-60.

³² - Stijn Manhaeghe, "Jan Taccoen van Zillebeke (Jehan de Zeilbeke) and his *Livre de Voeiages*: a survey", in Eddy Stols, Jorge Fonseca e Stijn Manhaeghe, *Lisboa em 1514. O relato de Jan Taccoen van Zillebeke*, Lisboa, Húmus/Centro de História da Cultura, 2014, p.83.

³³ - Mireille Issa, "Les chrétiens d'Orient vus par les voyageurs en Terre Sainte. Louis de Rochechouart entre réalité et sources", in *Le Bilād al-Sam face aux mondes extérieurs* (Ed. Denise Aigle) Available in <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3959> [Accessed 2.12.2017].

Jan Taccoen came from one of Europe's most economically and culturally advanced regions in the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity, with which only Italy could compare³⁴. In his attempts to reach to the Holy Places of the East, he encountered and lived in cities and with peoples of different levels of wealth, mentalities and ways of life. Rome and Venice, naturally, attracted him most, for the magnificence of their artistic heritage, for the splendour of the festivities that took place, and for the characteristics of the societies that inhabited them, more in conformity with what he knew, except for the Romans' moral behaviour, which, it seems, left him somewhat scandalized. In Lisbon he was thrilled by the city's recent growth, originated in maritime trade, and admired the more exotic aspects encountered there, such as the king's elephants and the mix of races, but he was shocked by the processions of flagellants and the cruelty of the punishments inflicted on adulterers. In Palestine, in spite of the great symbolic value that he gave to the places and buildings he had occasion to see, he was struck by the decadence of many of those places, the poverty and desolation of the country and even more by the atmosphere of animosity towards Christian pilgrims that surrounded the whole visit. Having left several times his native Flanders to try to fulfil a religious intent, the journeys he made, by land and by sea, gave him also the opportunity to visit a large part of Renaissance Europe, as well as the Mediterranean. There he encountered frequently unexpected realities, typical of a time of economic dynamism, social and political change and great cultural creativity.

³⁴ - Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance. Culture and society in Italy*, 3.d ed., Cambridge, Pality Press, 2014, p. 256-259.