



Fernao, Are You Lying?

FERNAO MENDES PINTO, THE TRAVELLER

"Fernao Mentese? Minto" (Fernao, are you lying? I am lying). It was this witty play on the Portuguese words (Mendes, mentes, Pinto, minto) that caused the name of the author of the Travels to pass down the generations. Even before it was published this work aroused a great deal of curiosity and controversy about the veracity of the adventures it narrated. From the information contained in his account, we know that Fernao Mendes Pinto was born and lived in Montemor-o-Velho [Portugal] until the age of ten or twelve, in "the wretched poverty of his father's hovel", leaving for Lisbon at the end of 1521, taken there by an uncle who wished to set him on the path to a bet-ter future. Trouble and misfortune continued to dog his footsteps until, after a first frustrated departure, he set sail for India on the 11th of March of 1537 with the firm intention of making his fortune. During the twenty-one or so years that he remained in the Orient, he travelled untiringly between India and China, describing himself as one of the first westerners to reach Japan. He was a merchant, soldier, ambassador, man of God, but also a brigand, healer, and, more often than not, a prisoner. He returned to Lisbon on the 22nd of September, 1558, bearing as his greatest wealth letters of recommendation for services rendered to his native land. After four years of fruitless petitions to the Crown, he retired to the Palenca estate, in the locality of Pragal in Almada [Portugal], where he compiled the reminiscences contained in the Travels.

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BEST SELLER THAT STANDS THE TEST OF TIME

Since first published in 1614 in Lisbon, the Travels has never gone out of print and more than 100 new editions have been listed up to the present day, more than two hundred if we count the many reprints. In Portugal, following the 1829 edition, the work once again takes its rightful place in Portuguese Literature. Many partial editions are published which, singling out different episodes, reveal the many ways this text can be read, as becomes clear from the collections in which it is included (ranging from spiritual literature to tales of adventure or fantastic journeys). Fernao Mendes Pinto and his work continue to inspire artists from fields as different as literature, the visual arts, theatre and music.