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Prometheus, Ptolemy, Pigmalion and some pygmies

Even in the Rua Garrett, in its cafés or in its bookstores, even in the whole of the Chiado and its surroundings, it's not every week we find a Titan. I would even say that pygmies, the vain, the envious and the slanderous, are more numerous than the giants of the Antiquity. And to the same conclusion come the bibliographers, duty-bound to select from mountains of multilingual publications, but rarely arriving at the mythological. Now – if Ptolemy will forgive me! – I have just found at the antipodes of this Earth, which is not as flat as the Greek geographer would have it, a Titan. Published in Australia, instead of giving fire to mankind, it has developed into such a colossal endeavour that there are no words to describe it. Will it simply be gigantic? Or, preferably, monumental, Cyclopaean, pharaonic, Babylonian, Herculean, Himalayan? I opt for Promethean, because this fiendish British author who calls himself, very prosaically, Raymond Howgego, is about to complete a work that restores trust to the man of science and likens him to the gods or, at least, to the great encyclopaedists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, times when an author could bind himself to tasks so grandiose that they were almost mythical. Never will this author reach the glory or fleeting fame of, for instance, a Brazilian soccer player, of any star of the screen or king of finance, but in a hundred years his work will continue to be consulted with admiration by the entire world. Even in the Lusophone libraries!

With whom are we dealing? With a former physics teacher who, for about twenty years, has been preparing and writing – alone, although appealing to a number of informants – an encyclopedia that embraces the explorers of all times and of all the oceans and continents, that have left, directly or indirectly, written information about their discoveries. What are excluded, evidently, are the anonymous and great leaders of the unknown migrations that crossed the globe in times before the discovery of writing. Also excluded are the simple travellers or tourists that, in spite of having left a written account of their adventures, did not enlarge on our knowledge of the world. What interests our author are the discoverers, great or small, and even for these he is somewhat selective, because it is not the wanderers in Europe that secure his attention. However, it would be inexact to say that his *Encyclopedia of Exploration* is a formidable song of love dedicated only to European pioneers, because we also found among its number numerous Arabs – whose language the author knows – Chinese, Japanese and other oriental merchants or navigators. However, because scientific literature makes overwhelming use of European (including the Russian) languages, the result is that Raymond Howgego gives priority to the natives of this turbulent peninsula.

But he brings together an extraordinary collection of characters broadly unknown to the general reader – and even to the specialists – beyond his linguistic sphere! With Howgego there is no chauvinism, nor is there any bigotted nationalism that, as happens in the case of colonial literature, frequently deforms and unbalances the history of the discovery of the world. Of course, being British by birth and more comfortable, linguistically, with the ocean of sources and works in English, rather than in obscure works executed in Hungarian or Armenian, the author has tendency to give priority to documentation that is more easily accessible to him. The result of this action, here and there, is an overestimate of the part played by the Anglophones, but this does not seem to be intentional.

What is important to keep in mind is that the three volumes actually (2007) available represent more than 2600 pages in two columns (four for the index). The weight of these *in quarto* (210 mm x 285 mm) comes close to 7 kilos and we estimate that they contain 20 million characters, giving a good idea of the expanse of this text, but not of its importance. Volume I occupies the greater part of this

work, containing 2327 articles that support an index of more than 7500 names of persons or ships. It covers only the period from the earliest times up to 1800. The bibliography reaches almost 20,000 multilingual entries, annotated at times, with an indication of the translations of narratives that had 'wider' circulation. Most of these entries concern books or manuscripts. It is therefore not surprising to see the *Encyclopedia of Exploration* mentioned as a reference work in the catalogues of the great bookstores specializing in the journeys of the past. Volume II is more modest, despite its 700 pages, considering that it concerns merely the period from 1800 to 1850, and offers us 732 articles and an index with the names of more than 3000 famous travellers and 1000 ships, and citing more than 10,000 reference works. Volume III occupies 734 pages, divided between 524 articles that treat exclusively the oceans, the islands and the polar regions from 1850 to 1940, including the aerial journeys but omitting the great African, Asian and even American explorations. The index references close to 3000 new travellers and the bibliography includes more than 14,000 entries. He himself gives notice of a new volume for continental 'discoveries'. Personally, I think this final (?) volume should have more than 1800 pages so as not to disappoint Howgego's admirers. Maybe it will be necessary to face the possibility of a fifth volume to reintroduce the 'forgotten', to organize chronological tables for country 'of origin' (seducing the readers' nationalism) and country 'receiving'. When I spoke of a Promethean publication, did I greatly exaggerate?

As for the content of each article, it is presented, essentially, as a detailed description – at times with humorous notes – of each journey carried out by the major author of the report that forms the origin of the article. And Howgego, as meticulous as a philatelist, gives us the significant dates, almost day by day, the names of the major fellow-travellers (officials, scholars and even, at times, passengers embarked on maritime voyages). Some of the geographical articles let us know about the principal discoveries within a region. This type of article increases prolifically as we move forward in the time, in the direction of the present day, and it is a pity that the author has not enlarged their number in volume i. But this problem can be easily solved if the author decides to publish, in a fifth volume, tables by country. The bibliography, monumental in volume iii (seven columns dedicated to the Belgian Gerlache de Gomery), is divided between (a) works written by the traveller and his companions and (b) texts published about the traveller or written about his journeys by third parties. Orthographical errors are rare. Of course the importance given to each entry is debatable: to Gago Coutinho only two columns are devoted, while to the Galápagos Islands he devotes four. But, while it is not possible to quickly count the number of entries for country of origin, one estimates that there will be at least between 400 and 450 that are dedicated to the Portuguese, and maybe even more to the Spanish, something which allows us to write that, if we do not find, within five years, thirty copies of this *Encyclopedia* in the public or private libraries of Portugal, Brazil or Spain, it is advisable that the bibliographer should change profession, because, that being the case, all his toils would have been unheeded. They are with certainty expensive volumes, but they do honour to their author and his Australian publisher. A fabulous and *indispensable* work.