

Despite the poor quality of the English abstracts, this volume accomplishes each of its goals. It is a worthy addition not simply to studies on Sebastian Brant, but also on late medieval and early modern culture in the German lands. The volume is all the more welcome because it helps to address great imbalances in research about individual German humanists. Outside of very famous humanists like Philip Melanchthon, German humanism is a very unevenly researched field and many of the most famous humanists suffer from such imbalances, such as Hartmann Schedel, Sebastian Münster, Conrad Celtis and Beatus Rhenanus. Brant is just one of the first to receive this necessary rebalancing.

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Johannes Leo Africanus (Al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan). The cosmography and geography of Africa. Edited and translated by Anthony Ossa-Richardson and Richard J. Oosterhoff. (Penguin Classics.) Pp. xiii + 511 incl. 7 ills and 5 maps. London: Penguin, 2023. £14.99 (paper). 978 0 241 54393 1
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The author of this book – as he refers to himself throughout – was a diplomat who travelled through the northern part of the African continent from Marrakesh to Timbuktu to Cairo, over a period of around fifteen years. He describes the places he visited and shares his experiences. The main part of the account is an exhaustive and comprehensive survey of the various regions, listing the towns and also villages, agriculture, mountains, deserts and other features of the landscape. There are the histories of the area, descriptions of the buildings, including the mosques and madrassas, accounts of the way of life, including lively and racy descriptions of the less moral aspects of life. Interspersed are anecdotes of his personal experiences – for example the intriguing comment in his description of the animals of Africa that ‘he has twice escaped being eaten by lions, but he won’t tell the story here to avoid being too long-winded’. This is not only a travelogue, but also a unique record of the discovery of a continent. The writer, Al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan, was in the service of the sultan of Fez and made these journeys in the early fifteenth century. He was captured by Christian pirates in 1518 and taken to Rome, where he became Catholic and was given the new name of Johannes Leo Africanus. In the years that followed he recorded his experiences, drawing on other geographical texts and presumably embellishing the account with his own imagination. It was completed by 1526 and was published in 1550. It was the first book describing the African continent to be printed. The account was widely read and shaped perceptions of the continent and ideas about Africa in the Renaissance and after, until the colonial explorations of the nineteenth century brought new ideas of what Africa was. John Pory, an English geographer, translated the book in 1600 but there have been no further English translations until this version, which uses an earlier and more reliable Latin text, a lively and engaging style of translation and adds an introduction and notes. It makes this unique work once again available in a style which is both scholarly and accessible.

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