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JOHANNES LEO AFRICANUS
(AL-HASAN IBN MUHAMMAD AL-WAZZAN)

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JOHANNES LEO AFRICANUS, born al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan in Granada in the 1480s, served as a diplomat to the sultan of Fez during the first two decades of the sixteenth century. In 1518 he was seized by Christian pirates in the Mediterranean, brought to Pope Leo X and baptised Johannes Leo two years later. Living in Rome in the 1520s, he wrote a number of works, including his masterpiece, *The Cosmography and Geography of Africa*, in 1526. He is said to have later reconverted to Islam and moved to Tunis, but the remainder of his life remains shrouded in mystery.

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The Cosmography and Geography of Africa

Translated and edited by
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and RICHARD J. OOSTERHOFF

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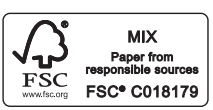

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Introduction

The word 'unique' is overused. But the work you are holding, a geographical and historical guide to Africa from the Italian Renaissance, really is unique. It was the first full-length book about its subject, and the first book by a modern African, to reach print. It was also the starting point in Europe for knowledge about much of Africa until the nineteenth century. Due to the singularity of its author's life and the circumstances of its composition, the book crossed boundaries in an extraordinary fashion: not only from Africa to Europe, but from Islam to Christianity, and from Arabic and Berber to Italian and Latin – and beyond. It conjures urban bustle and rural desolation, culture and commerce, labour, slavery and war, magical herbs and strange animals, personal experience and the shocks of history. In doing so it participates in a rhetoric of exoticism that was already becoming implicated in colonial projects and the European appropriation of Africa, and yet at the same time it is not, like so many treatises of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, a mere catalogue of the exotic to titillate the educated: its earliest readers, like its readers today, were invited not only to imagine lands unknown, but to acknowledge the similarities, continuities with and relevance to the time and place they knew. The *Cosmography and Geography of Africa* is, in other words, significant to our understanding not just of Africa, but of the world.

WHO WAS LEO AFRICANUS?

The writer known to Europe as Johannes Leo Africanus was born al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan in Granada, probably around 1488.[1] His uncertain date of birth is only the first in a long series of biographical doubts. We know nothing of his family: his surname either means 'the weigher' – perhaps indicating that his parents worked for the *muhtasib* or market inspector in Granada – or it connects him to the Beni Wazzan tribe of Berbers, who had ties to the royal Marinid and Wattasid dynasties in Fez.[2] At some point in the early 1490s, either before or soon after the fall of Granada to the Christians (1492), his family emigrated to Fez; al-Wazzan's education took place there, and in his book he claims that 'he was not raised [in Granada] and does not even remember it' (1.32). The family would have been one among hundreds of thousands who left Spain for the Maghrib during the Reconquista, forming a powerful and prosperous Andalusi community in North Africa. As al-Wazzan himself tells us, his father was a landowner in the regions outside Fez (2.2.2.17, 2.2.5.29), while his uncle (2.1.5.7) served as an ambassador on behalf of the sultan, Muhammad al-Burtuqali – 'the Portuguese', a nickname derived from his seven years of captivity as a child in that country.

Our sole source of information on al-Wazzan's life in Africa is his own book. He learned the Qur'an by heart at school, and studied grammar, theology and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) at the Bou Inania madrasa, whose sumptuous buildings still stand today. We have records of the astounding library of manuscripts in Wattasid Fez but know little about the learned culture in which al-Wazzan was educated, for the sources remain obscure – many of them unpublished and untranslated.[3] Al-Wazzan was evidently precocious: by the age of sixteen, as he tells us proudly (2.1.5.7), his poetic skills impressed foreign rulers. Like his uncle, he worked as a diplomat for al-Burtuqali, but also for Muhammad al-Qa'im, an emir of Sous and founder of the Sa'diyan dynasty that later wrested control of Morocco from the Wattasids. The latter he refers to as 'ash-Sharif', indicating his status as

sharif or noble descendant of the prophet Muhammad's family. On diplomatic missions Leo travelled all over the Maghrib, south to Timbuktu and other areas of sub-Saharan Africa – known in Arabic as 'Bilad as-Sudan', translated in the *Cosmography* as 'the Land of the Blacks' – and east to Egypt and Constantinople; at the end of his sixth book he lists the Arabian peninsula, Babylon, Persia, Armenia and Tartary as other destinations. He witnessed much of the warfare between the Wattasids, the Spanish and Portuguese Catholics, and the fearsome Turkish pirate brothers Oruç and Hızır Reis, both known to the West as Barbarossa. He also encountered the Ottoman emperor Selim I on his conquest of Mamluk Egypt in 1517.

In June 1518 a boat bound from Cairo to Morocco, with al-Wazzan on board, was seized by pirates, perhaps off the coast of Jerba – supposed by some to be the Island of the Lotus Eaters described by Homer – or else near Crete or Rhodes. The pirates were led by the Spaniard Pedro de Cabrera y Bobadilla, brother to the bishop of Salamanca, a confidant of Pope Leo X. Al-Wazzan was brought to the Pope within a few months. In November the Venetian politician Marin Sanudo noted Bobadilla's arrival at the papal court with a group of Moors, among them an 'ambassador from the king of Tlemcen', who had been captured on his return from congratulating Selim I for his victories in Syria and Egypt; Sanudo added that this man had some writings that the Pope wanted to have translated.[4] Al-Wazzan remained a prisoner in the Castel Sant'Angelo for a year and a half, until he agreed to convert to Christianity; the Pope baptised him at St Peter's Basilica on 6 January 1520, the Feast of the Epiphany. He gave al-Wazzan his own name, Leo, and christened him Joannes. A surname, 'de' Medicis', after Leo X's family, was never subsequently used. Instead he was Jo(h)annes Leo of Granada – or of Africa. This was the name that appeared on all his completed writings; Leo's birth name was not revealed until 1760, when the Maronite librarian Michael Ghaziri (or Casiri) discovered his Arabic signature on a manuscript, rendering it in Latin 'Alhassam Ben Mohamad Alvazan Fessanus'.[5]

Leo was evidently in demand at the papal court for his learning and languages, and, given the rise of the African kingdoms

and the Pope's desire for a new crusade against the Ottomans, his knowledge of Islamic Africa would also have been of significant political interest. Over the next seven years he produced a rich body of work, above all his magnum opus, the *Cosmography and Geography of Africa*, written in Italian and completed in 1526. The word 'cosmography', meaning a description of the world (*kosmos*), had been adopted by fifteenth-century printers as the title of geographical treatises by the ancient writers Ptolemy and Pomponius Mela and the modern writer Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, better known as Pope Pius II. For al-Wazzan it seemed to correspond to a genre of Arabic geography practised by great medieval authors such as al-Bakri and al-Mas'udi, and which he hoped to emulate for a European audience. Beyond the *Cosmography*, Leo wrote at least two surviving treatises, one on Arabic prosody and the other on the lives of great Arabs and Jews.[6] There also seems to have existed a work, now lost, entitled *Epitome of the Muslim Chronicles*, referred to frequently in the *Cosmography*, and another on Muslim law. During most of this period he lived in Rome, where he could enjoy the modest collection of Arabic manuscripts in the Vatican Library, and mingle with notable scholars such as Egidio da Viterbo, Elia Levita, Alberto Pio and Agostino Giustiniani. But he also visited Florence, Venice and Naples, and spent time in Bologna, where in 1524 he collaborated on a trilingual Arabic-Hebrew-Latin dictionary with the Jewish physician Jacob Mantino ben Samuel.[7]

We know almost nothing about Leo's later life. Natalie Zemon Davis suggests he may be identified with the 'Io. Leo' listed in a Roman census of January 1527, living in a household of three. One ambiguous later reference places his departure, and reconversion to Islam, at the time of the sack of Rome in 1527. A more solid witness, the German scholar and subsequent papal secretary Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, claimed in 1555 that 'Leo Eliberitanus' (Leo of Granada) had reconverted and moved to Tunis by 1532. Beyond this we are in the realm of fruitless speculation, at most a pastime for the scholarly imagination.

Admittedly, it is a pastime towards which Leo's work beckons us; historians seem to have the promise of a real person through

the screen of the *Cosmography*, and so they debate the ambiguous evidence. Did he inwardly convert to Christianity, or was it a ruse? Did he really visit sub-Saharan Africa, or only repeat the reports of merchants?[8] Such questions feel especially pressing at a time when the identity and authenticity of writers have become paramount for us – when we argue over who has the right to tell a given story, and seek to elevate those whose voices have traditionally been erased. But the *Cosmography*, with its absences, equivocations and fictions, does much to withhold this real person. Many critics have focused on a story that closes its first book. Leo tells of a bird who, when the king of the birds came to collect his tribute, dived into the sea to live among the fish; when the king of the fish came for his tribute, the bird fled back up into the sky. He explains it as a parable for his own practice: 'whoever spies an advantage will always wait and go after it. For instance, if the Africans are being insulted, he'll come up with the obvious excuse that he was not born there but in Granada; or when the Granadans are being insulted he'll give another excuse, that he was not raised there and does not even remember it' (1.32). This story has always stood out from the book; in 1612 an Oxford preacher cited it as a good example of how *not* to behave.[9] Today we are better disposed to appreciate cunning, flexibility and ambiguity. Davis responds to the vignette by characterising al-Wazzan as a 'trickster', acknowledging slipperiness but keeping our attention on the man. Dietrich Rauchenberger, meanwhile, sees in it a portrait of Leo not as a trickster but as a Muslim who had found the means to retain his faith, the wings of his soul, even when living among the heathen fish.

Another approach might be to relocate the focus of our attention from the man to his book – to treat it as an object in its own right, with its own life and character, a bright painting rather than a besmeared window onto the world of the past. When one remembers the circumstances of its composition, in distant exile among infidels, with few textual resources to help, one is struck by the quality of the performance. First and foremost it is a performance of memory: of names, places, events, dates, numbers. Even though the latter are nearly almost prefixed with 'circa' (about), we might be inclined to distrust their accuracy. Could

Leo really remember, eight years after his capture, that the Oulad Dalim tribe in the Libyan desert numbered ten thousand men, including four hundred cavalry? Or that the governor of Tuggurt received an annual revenue of 130,000 ducats? Perhaps Leo had notes with him. Or perhaps the *Cosmography* was a different sort of performance, that is, a charismatic performance of authenticity, the claim to encyclopaedic knowledge combined with a flair for storytelling. If we want to entertain this suggestion, the important question is not so much what clues can be gleaned of the real Leo, but how the *Cosmography* conjures the author and his subject for its Italian readers.

AFRICA IN THE *COSMOGRAPHY*

The *Cosmography* is the first direct appearance in a European language of what Matthew Keegan calls the 'Islamic archive': 'a vast and multifaceted realm of cultural memory that includes the Qur'ān, *ḥadīṯ*, and a multitude of other Islamic texts and discourses'.[10] The Africa that it offered Christendom for the first time was not an objective reckoning – as if such a thing could exist – but a construction of late medieval Muslim thought: a physical landmass with countless towns and peoples, but also a storehouse of ideas, starting with the very idea of Africa itself. Despite al-Wazzan's extensive travels, his Africa is archaic, with the ocean running straight along from Jenne and Mali to 'Gaoga' in the east, probably present-day Sudan (1.2). In places he explicitly follows the ancient geography of Claudius Ptolemaeus (known in modern English as Ptolemy), and Leo's general division of the four parts of Africa corresponds to the *aqalim* or climatic zones delineated by Muhammad al-Idrisi in the twelfth century: the coastal plains and mountains of Barbary (Arabic: Maghrib, 'the west'), followed by the dry lands of Numidia (Arabic: Bilad al-Jarid, 'the land of dates'), the vast deserts of Libya (Arabic: Sahra, 'the desert'), and finally the many kingdoms of the sub-Saharan 'Land of the Blacks' (translating the Arabic Bilad as-Sudan) – including a famous description of Timbuktu, dripping with gold, jewels and books. Egypt was only

disputedly part of Africa, but Leo includes it as a bonus. In the very first words of the *Cosmography*, he identifies Africa with the Arabic term 'Ifriqiya', although, as he admits, the latter name usually denoted a much smaller Islamic province centred around Tunis.[11] The result of these diverse sources is a rather ambiguous topographical and political entity not corresponding to any one single historical reality. Much less does it correspond to the structures we take for granted today, namely the nation states of Morocco, Tunisia and so on; these names do not appear in our translation, simply because Leo's categories are the four parts of Africa, and on a smaller scale the kingdoms of Marrakesh (2.1), Fez (2.2), Tlemcen (2.3) and Tunis (2.4). European place names pose less of a problem, with the exception of the frequent term 'Betteca' or 'Ebetteca', that is, Baetica, a Roman province in southern Spain; for Leo it means Muslim Spain, al-Andalus.

Beyond the geography itself, the most important topic in the *Cosmography*, from Leo's own perspective, is the many peoples of Africa. The two categories are impossible to disentangle: places in the Maghrib are frequently named after the tribes who occupied them, making the physical landscape a record of human communities. As with his geographical labels, Leo's demographic categories rarely map onto those with which we are now familiar: we look in vain for words like 'Tuareg' or 'Bedouin', and this difference is important to preserve.[12] His basic division in the book is between (1) the *Affricani bianchi*, the white Africans or Berbers, (2) the *Affricani nigri*, the black Africans south of the Sahara, and (3) the Arabs. All three groups, interestingly, are portrayed as immigrants to Africa: beneath the differences between peoples is a similarity. Leo derives the Berbers indecisively from the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Sabaeans of the Arabian peninsula, or an unnamed people of Asia; he traces the black Africans, following an ancient tradition, to Cush, Noah's grandson in Genesis 10:6, who in Leo's misremembering was also the grandfather of Philistim, progenitor of the Philistines. The Arabs, meanwhile, first invaded in the mid-seventh century under the command of the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, then migrated in huge numbers around the turn of the eleventh century, divided (according to Leo) into three main tribal groups, the Chachim,

the Hilal and the Maqil. This was a picture derived from the earlier Arabic tradition over many centuries, above all the Andalusi-Tunisian polymath Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406). As Ramzi Rouighi has recently argued, it was Ibn Khaldun above all who had cemented the Arabic construction of the Berbers as a distinct ethnic category, a notion alien to the indigenous tribes themselves.[13] His *Kitab al-'Ibar* (*Book of Examples*) – with its long, encyclopaedic first book often copied and published separately as the *Muqaddimah* (*Introduction*) – remains the single most important source for Leo's thought.

Al-Wazzan's stated views of the Africans – and one may wonder to what extent such views form part of his performance for a Christian audience – are often pejorative and insulting, especially when it comes to the sub-Saharan peoples, whom he frequently describes as brutish, ignorant, lustful and uncultured. Indeed, he cannot be absolved on historical grounds from a charge of racism; no less than his European readers, he took for granted a hierarchy of peoples determined in no small part by their culture and physical traits such as skin colour. As recent scholars such as Chouki El Hamel and Michael A. Gomez have shown, such a hierarchy had been a commonplace in the Arabic world in which Leo was raised: for several centuries Muslim scholars in the Maghrib had sought to justify slavery with racialised constructions of African tribes as well as northern Europeans.[14] Leo himself does not explicitly make the same connection, but it is hard to suppose that his view was significantly different, for the Africa he describes is full of slaves, most of whom are either traded from the Land of the Blacks (e.g. at 5.7) or imported from the Slavic and Circassian peoples far to the north (e.g. 6.26). Moreover, al-Wazzan was attentive to the larger differences of power that enabled enslavement; for instance, in a bleak passage he describes the starving Berber villagers of Barca (Cyrenaica), forced to sell their sons to Sicilian merchants in exchange for grain (1.22).

That said, the pejorative comments on the black Africans cannot be read as the straightforward expression of racial superiority. The bulk of his criticisms occur in a chapter (1.32) devoted to the faults of *all* the Africans, one that appears immediately

after a chapter on their virtues, each divided up according to the four regions. Thus the black Africans may be 'lacking all reason and worse than irrational . . . living like animals without laws and rules', but they are also 'people of integrity and good faith . . . without any malice', respectful of learning, and enjoying 'a better life' than any other people in the world. Meanwhile, Leo's own people, the 'white' city dwellers of the Maghrib, are painted in equally negative terms: 'poor, impetuous and cruel', 'credulous and simple-minded', 'illiterate and ignorant', and so on. As racist as Leo's assumptions likely were, this section is not a simple polemic: a better interpretation of the two chapters may be, again, as a rhetorical performance in an Arabic tradition of praise-and-blame, resembling somewhat the European scholarly exercise of arguing on both sides of a given question.[15]

The issues of race and slavery in the *Cosmography* cannot be isolated from the question of gender. Although al-Wazzan rarely focuses on the specific problems faced by African women, it is not hard to discern structures of power and systemic misogyny behind his descriptions, for instance in the grouping of women and slaves together as property of powerful men. He always has his eye out for the attractiveness and availability of local women, and his prose often adopts a knowing leer, as in Fuwwah, a town on the Nile, where 'the women enjoy such a freedom that their husbands do not know where they are all day; you can imagine the rest' (6.12). The humanity of female slaves is obscured still further than that of their male counterparts: in the mountains outside Marrakesh, they are sold for more than the men – though for half as much as camels – commodified as mere breeders and objects of pleasure (2.1.5.8). Leo innocently reports that in the Numidian province of Draa, the locals marry their black slave-women and produce children of mixed colour, but he fails to acknowledge any coercion or subjugation (3.5).[16]

Like so many of his peers and forebears, al-Wazzan's judgements on peoples, both positive and negative, turn primarily on questions of religion and *civiltà*, a difficult word that we have rendered as 'culture' rather than 'civility' or 'civilisation'. One of the first things that he tells his reader about a given city or mountain, after its size and location, is how *civile* or cultured it

is. He explains what culture means (2.3.16): mosques, madrasas, hospitals, hammams, inns, as well as the shops of merchants and artisans. It represents the advanced life of a community, and is the result of wealth, either from natural resources (e.g. 2.1.5.1) or trade (e.g. 2.2.1.3); conversely, culture can be depressed, along with population, by excessive taxation (e.g. 2.4.1.15). Because it is linked to wealth, culture is also connected to class; in Fez, Leo writes, 'the inhabitants of the city, or at least the burghers, are very cultured' (2.2.2.12.8). These burghers or *ciptadini* (*cittadini* in modern Italian) are an important feature of his demography: they are not nobles or gentlemen, but prosperous city-dwellers who have come to play a part in the regulation of civic life. Some townsfolk aspire to being *ciptadini* but are too coarse and poor (e.g. 2.2.4.4, 2.4.1.20). It is clear that this class is where Leo's own sympathies lie, but he is also quick to praise skilled artisans, such as the coppersmiths of Ceuta (2.2.4.14) or the female weavers in the mountains near Fez who can make wool blankets as fine as silk (2.2.7.15). By contrast, he can be highly critical of the corrupt and despotic ruling classes in Fez and elsewhere; he is more interested in, and spends more time describing, the hierarchies of court officials (2.2.2.15, 2.3.10.2, and especially 6.25–42). No doubt the emphases of this performance appealed to al-Wazzan's early readers, themselves members of a powerful civic class but eager for knowledge of artisanal excellence and Muslim tyranny.

A great deal of Leo's geography is taken up with history, and valuably fills several gaps in the historical record. But the spatial organisation of the book means that the history is told only in fragments, and we seem to see in it the Islamic centuries of Africa as through a glimmering crystal, turning from one facet to the next to catch the light. Underlying his vision is a mood, not quite captured by the English scholarship on his book,[17] of melancholy and nostalgia, for, while the great kingdoms of West Africa were flourishing and expanding in the sixteenth century, the old powers of the Maghrib were in decline. Leo could look back to the golden age of Islamic empire – to the Almoravids (*c.* 1050–1147), the Almohads (1147–1244) and the Marinids in their heyday (1244–1358). We hear repeatedly

in the *Cosmography* about the heroic warrior-leaders of these dynasties: Yusuf ibn Tashfin, 'Abd al-Mu'min, Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur, 'Abd al-Haqq I and Abu 'Inan Faris. The Almoravids and Almohads, both dynasties developed out of the uprisings of rural Berber tribes, had controlled much of the Maghrib and southern Spain, founding and expanding cities, commissioning splendid works of architecture, and cultivating theology, philosophy, jurisprudence and the arts.

After the fall of the Almohad empire, power in northern Africa fragmented into three main groups: the Marinids in the west, centred in Fez and Marrakesh, the Hafsids in the east, centred in Tunis, and the weaker Zayyanids in the middle, centred in Tlemcen. Of these the Hafsids proved the most resilient, lasting – with a couple of interruptions – until the Ottoman capture of Tunis in 1574; their survival may be attributable to their creation of local tribal coalitions, itself a necessary result of their separation from their own tribal (Masmuda) heartland in the Atlas mountains.[18] Closer to Leo's home, the Marinids swiftly imploded in the second half of the fourteenth century, and continued to contract and weaken in the fifteenth, giving way eventually to the fragile Wattasid sultanate in Fez, but also to smaller regional powers and to the incursions of the Portuguese and Spanish along the coast, which had begun with the conquest of Ceuta in 1415. Leo himself had a ringside view of these bouts, working in some capacity for both the Wattasids and the Sa'diyans. One figure who encapsulates the unsteady politics of the period is the shadowy Berber chief Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Muhammad-u-Ta'fuft (d. 1518). After helping his friend 'Ali ibn Washman overthrow the semi-autonomous regime in Safi, Yahya defected to the Portuguese as a vassal *alcaide* (governor) from 1511; his name features regularly in state correspondence of the period, although the Portuguese captains stationed in Safi regarded him with distrust.[19] Leo met Yahya on an official mission, apparently from both Muhammad al-Burtuqali and Muhammad al-Qa'im (2.1.4.2), in Tumeglast – perhaps present-day Gmassa – where Yahya had come to collect tribute on behalf of Manuel I of Portugal (2.1.3.7). Likewise, al-Wazzan witnessed warfare first hand, such as the 1515–16

battle with the Portuguese and Spanish at Ma'mura, after which, he wrote, 'the waves heaved with blood' (2.2.2.4). The rise of warlords like Yahya, and the losses to the Iberians (and later the Ottomans), were results of the slow collapse of centralised power. As the Moroccan historian and philosopher Abdallah Laroui put it fifty years ago:

> The two centuries between the death of the Marīnid sultan Abū 'Inān [in 1358] and the defeats of the Spaniards at Tunis (1574) and of the Portuguese at El Ksar (1578) are a period of deep-seated regression, which for this very reason may well be one of the most significant periods in the history of the Maghrib.[20]

The great early witness of this decline was, again, Ibn Khaldun, whose pessimistic reading of the decline of civilisations was thoroughly informed by his experience of Marinid decadence after the death of Abu 'Inan. One hundred and fifty years later, al-Hasan al-Wazzan, without any explicit theory of society and politics, lamented the past and ongoing destruction of the world he knew; for good reason Laroui writes that the *Cosmography* 'should be taken as a picture not of a static world but of a phase in a process'. Even as a young man Leo had fixated on the grave, attempting to compile all the epitaphs in the Maghrib for 'a work of many chapters on the grief, sadness and bitter fear of death' (2.2.2.13.2). Later in life, as he went about his diplomatic duties, he found himself constantly saddened by loss, especially in the province of Tamasna, ruined during the Lamtuna invasion of the eleventh century, and the areas surrounding Fez, ruined in the siege of 1411. Of Anfa (modern Casablanca) he writes that 'the sight made him weep despite himself' (2.2.1.3), while in Rabat he experienced 'a deep melancholy for the vast difference between the life of the world when was founded, and its life today' (2.2.1.9). Salé, near Rabat, lost 'two-thirds of its culture' during Christian occupation and the current inhabitants had no appreciation for its fine old columns and marble windows (2.2.2.2). Soussa 'is now almost entirely uninhabited' (2.4.1.29) and only a fifth of its houses and a few shops remained; Leo's party 'felt great compassion and pity' at seeing the town mistreated by the

local rulers. Even in the Almoravid capital Marrakesh, 'one of the grandest and greatest cities in the world', the ruined kasbah, and its beautiful old library, were now haunted by 'pigeons, crows, owls' (2.1.3.9). In Roman exile, Leo was looking back to a time when he had already been looking further back, memory mingled with forgetting.

The history in the *Cosmography* is valuable but factually unreliable. Leo's narratives are often hard to contextualise against other sources, and are sometimes contradicted by them, especially in earlier centuries and more distant lands, for instance with his account of the twelfth-century Kurdish general and sultan Saladin (6.26). Geopolitical struggles are often rendered as personal dramas, impossible to corroborate, as when the fall of Ceuta to the Portuguese in 1415 is imputed to the fact that the Marinid sultan heard of the attack during a party and refused to stop dancing (2.2.4.14). National catastrophe thus becomes for al-Wazzan, as for so many premodern writers, the stage for a moral lesson.

The *Cosmography* is an image of Africa, but it is also an image of Leo himself – proud, learned and worldly. We need not, of course, take that portrait at face value: it was the last and finest touch of his performance. Personal reminiscence is interwoven with the geography and history throughout, giving us the charm of subjective colour on the features and events described. In Ramusio's edition of the text, al-Wazzan refers to himself in the first person, but in the manuscript he mostly uses the third. His word for himself, *compositore*, is particularly interesting, as it means 'compositor', 'composer', 'compiler', someone who puts materials together; as he remarks at 2.1.3.13, when he visited the mountain of Semede in Morocco, he had to write out legal documents for the locals because none of them could *comporre* (put together) two words. It is also clear that Leo distinguishes a *compositore* from an *auctore* (see for instance 1.25 and 2.1.6.8), which he always uses in the sense of a venerable authority such as Ibn Khaldun. But as noted by Oumelbanine Zhiri, one of the world's foremost Leo scholars, his frequent expression 'ipso compositore dice' renders the Arabic phrase, common in writings of the period, *qala al-mu'allif*, which just

means 'the author says'. We have therefore translated *compositore* as 'author' and *auctore* usually as 'authority', though the reader should bear in mind the subtlety of the term.

These performances are rich and complex, but they do not add up to an 'authentic' African vision of Africa, if by authenticity we mean an unfiltered, pre-European image – a phantom of colonial desire. Rather, the *Cosmography*, no less hybrid and no less knowing than its author, anticipates the language and questions of its Christian readers. Such an entanglement, far from being a weakness, constitutes the book's primary power.

READERSHIPS

Oumelbanine Zhiri has rightly said that the *Cosmography* 'holds a place of the first rank in the European construction, from the Renaissance onwards, of an "African" realm of knowledge, and a study of the work is important for understanding the past as well as the present European notion of Africa and the Maghrib.'[21] This is partly due to the fact that it contained a huge amount of information unavailable elsewhere in Europe for a long time. Western scholars could read a little about the West Coast of Africa in Alvise Cadamosto's records of his 1455–56 voyages (first published in 1507), about Ethiopia in Francisco Álvares's *True Report on the Lands of Prester John of the Indies* (1527, first published 1540), and about Egypt, especially Cairo, in a number of pilgrimage reports of the period, as well as in Pierre Belon's fascinating *Observations of Many Singularities and Memorable Things* (1553). They could also read accounts of African battles in the chronicles of João de Barros, Damião de Góis and others. Other eyewitness accounts of Africa, such as those of Gomes Eannes de Zurara, Duarte Pacheco Pereira, Valentim Fernandes and André Álvares de Almada, would be published only centuries later.[22] In breadth and depth, al-Wazzan's only real rival was Luis del Mármol Carvajal, a Spanish adventurer and historian whose *Descripción general de África* (1573–99) borrows much from the *Cosmography* while adding important first-hand material.[23]

However, the attraction of Leo's work for European readers was not solely a result of its valuable data. Its style and mood, too, played a part. In particular, the book's authorial voice holds two contrasting approaches to the reader in creative counterpoint, the first insisting on the wondrous, marvellous, extraordinary sights and places of Africa, unlike anything its Italian readers could imagine, the second finding points of continuity and resonance with Italy and Europe more broadly. In other words, the *Cosmography* both pushes and pulls. 'In spring, anyone approaching will smell such sweet fragrances and odours from the blossoms of orange, lemon, citron and other fruit that it will truly seem a paradise on earth' (2.2.2.12.7). 'The author has seen . . . a canopy bed made entirely with needlework, covered on top with a fine net of pearls weighing forty-five pounds; even without the pearls, the bed went for 10,000 *sherifi*' (6.17). But the people of Fez 'wear simple caps on their heads, like those worn in Italy at night' (2.2.2.12.8), and 'the roofs of the mosques are all built like the churches in Europe' (2.2.2.11). We ought not to prioritise one approach at the expense of the other; the book's strength lies at least partly in its unresolved ambivalence.

The book proved to be of singular interest to audiences across Europe. In the Renaissance, plagiarism was the sincerest form of flattery, and we find whole chunks of the *Cosmography* repeated near-verbatim in the works of Mármol, Damião de Góis, Livio Sanuto, André Thevet and others. The French political theorist Jean Bodin praised the book, and the polymath Isaac Casaubon, having emigrated to England at the end of his career, filled his Latin copy with eager annotations, cross-referencing the Bible, classical literature and Arabic geography.[24] Many writers simply mined the work for information, from ancient African religion to contemporary wedding customs; Michel de Montaigne noted the nomadic practice of covering the mouth while eating, and much later the young Jean-François Champollion, who subsequently deciphered the Rosetta Stone, used Leo's account of Egypt in drawing up his own topography of the Nile. Since its translation by John Pory in 1600, English readers, too, have taken an interest, some of them very illustrious. It has often been suggested that Shakespeare's Othello, an exiled and converted Moor, was

inspired by al-Wazzan. John Milton, certainly, in his sonorous list of future kingdoms spied by Adam from a hill in Eden, has three lines of names extracted from the *Cosmography*:

> Or thence from Niger Flood to Atlas Mount,
> The Kingdoms of Almansor, Fez and Sus,
> Marocco and Algiers, and Tremisen . . .
> (*Paradise Lost*, XI.402–404)

Two centuries later, Herman Melville would, somewhat inevitably, fillet curious details about whales from one chapter. Perhaps the most surprising engagement with al-Wazzan by a literary writer was that of W. B. Yeats, who claimed at a séance in 1912 to commune with a spirit calling itself 'Leo Africanus'; upon consulting the 1896 edition of Pory's translation, Yeats was delighted to discover that Leo had been 'a distinguished poet among the Moors'. In 1986, readers of fiction were confronted with al-Wazzan in the novel *Léon l'Africain* by the Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf. The novelist borrows many vignettes and episodes from the *Cosmography*, but also adds details of his own, such as giving his hero a black, fourteen-year-old slave-girl as a lover. Of course, while casting our eyes over the long story of Leo's readership, we must not forget the present. In the early twenty-first century, readers across the world are clamouring for better access to, and greater understanding of, the words and worlds of peoples beyond the narrow canon of Western literature; our task, like Leo's, is to acknowledge both profound difference and a common humanity. It is in such a spirit that the present translation is offered.

THE TEXT

The text of the *Cosmography* has a complex and interesting history. The work was not published until 1550, when it appeared in an edition by the distinguished Venetian geographer Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485–1557), as the first part of his three-volume collection of travel narratives, *Navigationi e Viaggi*

(*Navigations and Voyages*). This text, which Ramusio entitled *La descrittione dell'Africa* (*The Description of Africa*), was subsequently translated into French by Jean Temporal (1556) and into Latin by the Antwerp schoolmaster Jan Blommaerts or Joannes Florianus (1556). The Temporal translation is worth noting for its woodcut images, a few of which we have reproduced in this volume; the unknown artist was working purely from the text, rather than from any independent knowledge of Africa, but the woodcuts give us some idea of how contemporary European audiences might have visualised al-Wazzan's descriptions. Florianus's version was the one most widely read in the Renaissance, but unfortunately it was wildly inaccurate; a later German translator claimed to have spotted 'six hundred' errors in it, the usual Latin idiom for 'an awful lot'.[25] Indeed, in Florianus we find howlers like *Iudaeus* (Jew) for *giudice* (judge), and *ver* (spring) for *inverno* (winter), as well as many little deliberate additions, deletions and rewritings. It was this version that John Pory (1572–1636), a young associate of the geographer Richard Hakluyt, translated into English in 1600, preserving Florianus's errors and adding a few of his own.

Pory's text remains the only version in English until today. It was re-edited in the 1890s by the Scottish botanist and explorer Robert 'Campsterianus' Brown (1842–95) for the Hakluyt Society, in three volumes, with copious notes, many of which are still useful, and an introduction detailing the faults in the translation, although the text itself remains uncorrected. Commissioned in 1890, it was Brown's last work, and he died a year before it appeared in print.

In December 1931 a discovery was made that would transform historians' understanding of the *Cosmography*, when the first (and still the only) known manuscript of the work appeared at auction in Rome. The 957-page manuscript, now Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, MS V.E. 953, is entitled *La cosmogrophia* [*sic*] *& geographia de Affrica*: this is the text we have translated, and consequently the title we have used. What it immediately revealed is that Ramusio had rewritten the text from beginning to end, mostly to improve its prose style, but also cutting salacious passages and emending in places.[26] The corollary

for an English reader is that the Pory translation is at three, not two, removes from the original. The manuscript is not in Leo's hand, and shows signs of scribal error; it is also not the copy used by Ramusio, whose text has more accurate numbers in places and contains two substantial passages not in our manuscript (these have been included here, in square brackets). The manuscript is dated 10 March 1526, but so is the colophon at the end of Ramusio's edition, suggesting that the date is in fact that of the completion of the work, not the copy. In fact, there is a good reason to believe that the copy is somewhat later, for it incorporates at least one subsequent event, namely the accession of Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah II of Tlemcen in 1528 (see 2.3.1). Since there is no break in the manuscript here, perhaps the scribe incorporated marginal additions from Leo's autograph copy.

Soon after its discovery, the manuscript became attached to the Milanese Arabist and geographer Angela Codazzi (1890–1972), who had penned an unpublished study of Leo a decade earlier. An edition of the manuscript became her life's work, but although she became known across Europe as the foremost expert on the *Cosmography*, the edition was never completed. The closest it came was in England. In the late 1940s, the Hakluyt Society investigated the possibility of a new, dual-language edition of the *Cosmography*.[27] The Society's secretary, R. A. 'Peter' Skelton, asked E. W. Bovill, a historian with several works on Africa under his belt, to produce a translation and commentary in collaboration with Gerard Crone, with whom Bovill had previously worked on the Society's 1937 translation of the *Voyages of Cadamosto*. Codazzi, the Society's only Italian member, would supply the text; it was to be edited from the manuscript with variants from Ramusio's edition. Skelton's proposal for a five-volume edition was accepted, with some hesitation, by the Society Council in January 1962. Everyone waited for Codazzi to supply her text. But it did not come. Bovill died in 1966, Skelton in 1970, Codazzi in 1972.

Another publication associated with Codazzi was more successful, namely the 1956 French translation by Alexis Épaulard (1878–1949), which has been used by scholars for the past half-century as the standard edition of the work. Épaulard's

correspondence with Codazzi until his death evokes a tense relationship: he hoping to work together and share expertise, she polite but aloof, unwilling to let her research be published under his name, or even to share her images of the manuscript.[28] The published translation uses Ramusio as its text, with only occasional reference to the manuscript, which Épaulard had studied for two weeks in June 1939; it was completed, and furnished with excellent notes, by a trio of specialists, Théodore Monod, Henri Lhote and Raymond Mauny. (These three were also to participate in the Hakluyt Society edition, although, as Skelton lamented, Lhote was by this stage 'persona non grata' among French scholars, perhaps for his 1958 book claiming extraterrestrial contact with the ancient peoples of the Sahara.) We have gratefully used the French notes (cited as 'Épaulard') in compiling our own, but the reader should turn directly to that edition for further information on certain historical details, and for fuller attention to the discrepancies between Leo's geography and the reality of modern Africa.

In 2014 the manuscript itself finally appeared in print, lightly edited by Gabriele Amadori. This is the text we have used for the translation, with additional reference to the high-resolution images of the manuscript online at the Biblioteca Nazionale's Biblioteca Digitale. We believe ours is the first ever translation directly from the manuscript, although we have allowed ourselves to emend where we have judged Ramusio's reading better. A new edition of the Italian, with the manuscript and Ramusio's text on facing pages, is currently being prepared by Andrea Donnini.

THE TRANSLATION

In this volume we have aimed to produce a clear and readable translation for a general audience, but a few words will be necessary on some of our strategies and word choices. Translating the *Cosmography* poses two unusual challenges. First, Italian was not Leo's native language, and the style is, at least by the standards of Renaissance humanism, inelegant and sometimes confusing. His sentences are not periodic or rhythmic, but instead consist

usually of chains of simple statements joined by 'and', 'and so', 'but', 'therefore', 'because', and so on. We decided that rigidly preserving these structures, while philosophically defensible, would be grating for the general reader, and have therefore neatened up the sentences a little and cut some empty repetition; however, we have not rewritten to anything like the same extent as Ramusio, and in places we have permitted a little inelegance and stiltedness to remain. To give a flavour of the original, here is a passage, taken at random, from Leo's chapter on the town of Collo in present-day Algeria:

> E il populo di la dicta terra vive in sua liberta simelmente loro vicini montanari e li ciptadini con li dicti montanarii sonno tutti in una lega contra el re di Tunis e il prencepe o logotenente del re che sta in Constantina li quali cercano continuo di potere subiicere la dicta terra ma non e stato mai possibile peroche ce sonno altissimi monti habitati da valenti homini. (2.4.1.7, MS 305r)

Literally translated this would turn out as something like:

> And the people of the said town live in their freedom, likewise their neighbours the mountainfolk, and the citizens with the said mountainfolk are all in a league against the king of Tunis and the prince or viceroy of the king who lives in Constantine, who seek continually to be able to subjugate the said town, but it was never possible because these are very high mountains inhabited by brave men.

Whereas we have translated it:

> They live in freedom, as do the neighbouring mountainfolk, with whom the citizens are allied against the king of Tunis and his prince or viceroy in Constantine. These two are always trying to subjugate the town, but have never succeeded, because the mountains are very high and their inhabitants are brave.

Likewise, we have permitted elegant variation in passages with a repetitive vocabulary; for instance, 'dopoi El Mansor la renovo

li muri e fece ivi uno hospitale *bellissimo* e uno *bellissimo* palatio per logiamento delli soi soldati e anchi uno *bellissimo* templo dove fece una *bellissima* sala ornata di marmori intagliati a musaicho' (2.2.1.10, italics added), which we have translated as 'Al-Mansur later renovated the walls and built a *very fine* hospital, a *magnificent* block as barracks for his soldiers, and a *splendid* mosque with a hall adorned with inlaid marble mosaics'. On similar grounds, we have tended to omit Leo's near-universal use of the word 'circa' (about) before numbers.

The second challenge is that, to communicate key terms of Muslim culture, Leo often chose corresponding words from classical or Christian culture. For instance, his usual word for a mosque is *tempio*, 'temple', and for a caliph *pontifice*, 'pontiff'. This was a brilliant stroke of familiarisation for an audience that might otherwise have been daunted by words and concepts for which they had no equivalent. (The practice is inconsistent: occasionally we find *moschea*, *califa* and so on in Leo's text.) However, we live today in a global society, and a gesture intended to draw Leo's readers in would now have the opposite effect. We have therefore rendered these words with the more usual term in English, feeling that it would be too jarring to a general reader for a caliph to be called a pontiff, and so on. Most of the Arabic words have become sufficiently naturalised to need no explanation, but others may need a gloss. Here is a full list:

caliph, for Leo's 'pontefice' (pontiff). The supreme religious and political authority of an Islamic region.

Eid al-Fitr, for Leo's 'Pascha' (Easter). The feast of breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan, also called Eid es-Seghir in Morocco.

hammam, for Leo's 'stufa' (stove or bathhouse). The public baths, modelled on the Roman baths, that represent an important feature of any large Muslim city.

imam, for Leo's 'sacerdote' (priest). In Sunni Islam, the imam is not a priest in a church hierarchy, but the prayer leader in a mosque.

ksar, for Leo's 'castello' (castle). A fortified village of a recognisable type in North Africa.

madrasa, for Leo's 'collegio' (college). An institution of higher learning, focused on jurisprudence.
minaret, for Leo's 'turre' (tower), where appropriate. The tower adjacent to a mosque and used for the call to prayer.
mosque, for Leo's 'tempio' (temple).

By contrast, where the Arabic term would be too obscure for an English reader, or when the English term does not misrepresent the meaning, we have translated more directly, sometimes with a footnote. For instance, when referring to the *mahr* or bride price used in Muslim marriage ceremonies, Leo's word is *dote*, which we have rendered literally as 'dower'; likewise, we have translated *consulo*, his term for the *amin* or head of a trade guild, as 'consul'.

Arabic personal names and tribe names have been rendered using modern conventions, using a ' for the *ayin* and a ' for the *hamza*; for instance, 'Abd al-Mu'min is our spelling of Leo's *Habdulmumen*.[29] With our readership in mind, we have prioritised accessibility over regularity in transcribing place names. Where there is a standard English form (e.g. Algiers, Marrakesh, Timbuktu) we have used that, and where there are competing alternatives we have preferred forms with less French influence (e.g. Tuggurt for Touggourt, Jerba for Djerba). Otherwise we have given modern Arabic forms, using *al-* for the article except where *el* has become the norm; for instance we use the French-tinged 'Oued el Abid' instead of 'Wad al-Abid'. In a few instances we give both the Arabic and the European forms in the title of a chapter, e.g. 'Sabta (Ceuta)'. The forms used by al-Wazzan himself have also been provided in a separate index. We have followed Leo's inconsistent gemination of the Arabic definite article: for instance 'at-Tawil' (ettauil) and 'ash-Sharif' (Esserif), but 'al-Sheikh' (El Saic).

Finally, a few other notes on our choice of words, spelling and punctuation. When Leo uses words in Arabic, Persian, Latin, Berber and Hausa, we have retained them, supplying a gloss in brackets whenever Leo himself does not. We have done the same for Italian or Arabic words that have no English equivalent, notably the terms for units of measurement, the *cantar*, the

ratl, the *scorzo* and the *canna* – usually defined in the text – and for coinage, as follows:

baiocco. An Italian silver coin, roughly 100 to the ducat; Leo means the silver dirham, which was likewise around 100 to the gold dinar (see 2.3.10.2).
ducat (*ducato*). The gold dinar or *mithqal* (strictly a measure of mass, equal to 4.25 grams) widely used in the Islamic world.
duppuli. This word seems to denote a Hafsid gold dinar, since it is only used in Book 2.4 (the kingdom of Tunis). Apparently a form of *doppio* or *doppia*, 'double', the name of a number of European gold coins from the period; compare *dobla*, *doubloon*, etc.
quattrino. A copper coin worth (in Leo's time) a quarter of a *baiocco*; Leo may mean either a copper coin like the *fals* or a fractional dirham.
sherifi (Leo's *srafini* or *seraphini*). An Ottoman ducat used in Egypt, sometimes rendered *seraph*. Equivalent to the *zecchino* (*chequin*, *sequin*).

Terms for settlement types we have consistently rendered with the following words: *cipta*, city; *terra*, town; *terrecciola*, little town; *castello*, ksar; *casale*, village; *habitatione*, settlement. That said, Leo himself does not always use these terms consistently; for instance, he refers to Larache (2.2.3.3) as both a *cipta* and a *terra*.

Leo usually gives dates according to the Arabic calendar, dated from the *hijra* of AD 622 (AH 1, or *Anno Hegirae 1*). We have supplied the equivalent date in the Christian calendar in brackets; except where we had more specific evidence, we give the latter as a range of two years, since the two calendars are not synchronised. It is worth noting, from the one or two instances where Leo gives both forms, that he did not know the correct means of converting dates between calendars, and where appropriate and possible we have supplied correct dates in a footnote.

All brackets in the text are added by us. Square brackets indicate textual lacunae, but also subheadings in the three chapters

on Fez (2.2.2.11–13) and one on Tlemcen (2.3.10.1), introduced by Ramusio to break up the text. The other divisions are Leo's own, although we have added the numeration. Round brackets supply brief glosses, including fuller personal names, alternative renderings of place names, dates in the Christian calendar and translations of non-Italian words.

NOTES

1 For the reasons for this dating, see 2.1.4.2, note 60 (pp. 472–3).

2 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 18, prefers the first explanation (originally advanced by the founder of modern Leo studies, Louis Massignon), while Dietrich Rauchenberger, *Johannes Leo*, 28–9, proposes the second. The latter points out the concentration of Berbers in Granada, and notes that the adjective 'Affricano', which Leo applies to himself in the *Cosmography*, usually denotes the Berbers, not the Arabs, in Africa.

3 See, e.g., Mohamed B. A. Benchekroun, *La vie intellectuelle marocaine sous les Mérinides et les Waṭṭāsides, XIIIe, XIVe, XVe, XVIe siècles* (Rabat, 1974), 8–9; see also 57 on the Fez library.

4 Marino Sanudo, *Diarii*, ed. F. Stefani, 58 vols (Venice, 1879–1902), XXVI, col. 195.

5 Michael Casiri, *Bibliotheca arabico-hispana Escurialensis* (Madrid, 1760), I, 172.

6 These treatises are preserved in a single, neatly written manuscript in the Laurentian Library in Florence, Plut.36.35; page images are available on the library website. The treatise on prosody was edited by Angela Codazzi as 'Il trattato dell'Arte Metrica di Giovanni Leone Africano', in *Studi Orientalistici in Onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1956), 180–98. The other work has recently been translated into French by Jean-Louis Déclais and Houari Touati as *De quelques hommes illustres chez les Arabes et les Hébreux* (Paris, 2000).

7 This dictionary is now Real Biblioteca del Escorial, Spain, Manuscritos árabes MS 598.

8 For the sceptical view, see Pekka Masonen, *The Negroland Revisited*, 189–94.

9 Thomas Anyan, *A Sermon Preached at S. Maries Church in Oxford, the 12. of July. 1612* (London, 1612), 22.

10 Matthew L. Keegan, 'Digressions in the Islamic Archive: Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* and the Forgotten Commentary of al-Panǧdīhī (d. 584/1188)', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 10 (2022), 82–118, at 85.
11 On 'Ifriqiya', see Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 125–6. The name is used only once in the rest of the *Cosmography* (in 1.13).
12 Dominique Casajus, 'Les noms de peuples ont une histoire', in *Léon l'Africain*, ed. François Pouillon, 103–17.
13 Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers*.
14 El Hamel, *Black Morocco*, 60–90, and Gomez, *African Dominion*, 43–57.
15 The fourteenth-century Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta includes a similar section on the Land of the Blacks (*Travels*, IV.965–6). Leo himself mentions an example of this Arabic genre at 2.4.1.13.
16 On women and Islamic slavery, see especially El Hamel, *Black Morocco*, 11–12 and 17–58.
17 See, however, Guy Turbet-Delof, *L'Afrique barbaresque dans la littérature française aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Geneva, 1973), 57–8, and the conclusion of Federico Cresti, 'Il Maghreb centrale agli inizi del XVI secolo: Strutture politiche, economie urbane e territorio nella *Descrittione dell'Africa* di Giovanni Leone Africano', *Africa* 53.2 (1998), 218–38, at 236–7.
18 Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa*, 48–9.
19 Matthew T. Racine, 'Service and Honor in Sixteenth-Century Portuguese North Africa: Yahya-u-Ta'fuft and Portuguese Noble Culture', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 32.1 (2001), 67–90.
20 Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib: An Interpretive Essay*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, 1977), 227, 299.
21 Zhiri, '"Il compositore", 65.
22 For more information, see John Thornton, 'European Documents and African History', in *Writing African History*, ed. John Edward Philips (Rochester, NY, 2005), 254–65.
23 A little later, one can add Duarte Lopes' *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade* (Rome, 1591) and two more derivative works, Diego de Torres' *Relacion del Origen y Sucesso de los Xarifes y del Estado de los Reinos de Marruecos, Fez, etc.* (Seville, 1586), and Jean-Baptiste Gramaye's *Africa illustrata* (Tournai, 1622).
24 Now British Library, shelfmark 793.d.2.
25 Georg Wilhelm Lorsbach, *Solemnia academica* (Herborn, 1801), 7.
26 See Zhiri, 'Leo Africanus, Translated and Betrayed'.

27 British Library, Hakluyt Society Archives, Mss Eur F594/6/1/15.
28 Biblioteca Comunale Centrale di Milano, Carte Codazzi, fasc. 70/14.
29 The exception is unidentified names, which we have left as given; but these are rare.

Timeline

711–18	Muslim conquest of Spain.
789	First foundation of Fez.
859	Construction of Qarawiyyin Mosque, Fez.
969	Foundation of Cairo.
910	Foundation of the Fatimid Caliphate.
c. 1050	Start of Almoravid dynasty.
1070	Foundation of Marrakesh.
1147	Start of Almohad dynasty.
1212	Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa.
1244	Start of Marinid dynasty in Fez.
1355	Completion of Bou Inania Madrasa, Fez.
1358	Death of Abu ʻInan Faris.
1377	Ibn Khaldun completes the *Muqaddimah*.
1411	Siege of Fez.
1415	Portuguese conquest of Ceuta.
1465	Accession of Wattasids in Fez.
c. 1488	Al-Hasan al-Wazzan's birth in Granada.
1492	Spanish conquest of Granada; end of the Reconquista.
1504	Accession of Muhammad al-Burtuqali as sultan of Fez.
1511	Portuguese conquest of Safi.
1515–16	Battle of Maʻmura.
1516	Barbarossa captures Algiers.
1517	Ottoman invasion of Egypt.
1518	Al-Wazzan's capture by pirates in the Mediterranean.
1520	Al-Wazzan's baptism as Jo[h]annes Leo in Rome.
1524	Saʻdiyan capture of Marrakesh.

1526	Completion of the *Cosmography*.
1532	(?) Leo living in Tunis.
1550	Publication of *Description of Africa* by G. B. Ramusio.
1556	Latin translation of *Description* by J. Florianus.
1600	English translation of *Description* by J. Pory.
1931	Rediscovery of *Cosmography* manuscript in Rome.
2014	First published edition of manuscript.

Further Reading

The editions we have consulted are the following, in date order:

La descrittione d'Africa, in *Navigationi e Viaggi*, ed. Giovanni Battista Ramusio, vol. 1 (Venice, 1550).
Description de l'Afrique, tierce partie du monde, trans. Jean Temporal (Lyon, 1556). The source of our images.
The History and Description of Africa and of the Notable Things Therein Contained, trans. John Pory, ed. Robert Brown, 3 vols (London, 1896, reissued by Cambridge UP, 2010).
Description de l'Afrique, trans. Alexis Épaulard, ed. Alexis Épaulard, Th. Monod, H. Lhote and R. Mauny (Paris, 1956).
Dietrich Rauchenberger, *Johannes Leo der Afrikaner: Seine Beschreibung des Raumes zwischen Nil und Niger nach dem Urtext* (Wiesbaden, 1999). Books Four and Five.
Cosmographia de l'Affrica (Ms. V.E. 953 – Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma – 1526), ed. Gabriele Amadori (Rome, 2014). Our source text.

In addition to the Pory *History and Description*, there have been excerpts in English translation found in:

A. R. Allen, *Leo's Travels in the Sudan* (London, 1962): parts of Book 5, adapted from Pory's translation.
John O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* (Leiden, 2003), 272–91: parts of Book 5, from Ramusio.

Pierre Joris, 'From *Travel Diaries*', in *Poems for the Millennium: The University of California Book of North African Literature, Volume Four*, ed. Pierre Joris and Habib Tengour (Berkeley, 2012), 179–82: parts of Book 1 and Book 2 (Fez), from Épaulard.

Oumelbanine Zhiri, 'Leo Africanus's *Description of Africa*', in *Travel Knowledge: European 'Discoveries' in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh (London, 2001), 249–57: parts of Book 1, from the manuscript.

There are only a few items in English worth reading on Leo Africanus: above all Natalie Zemon Davis's first-rate biography, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York, 2006), but also Pekka Masonen, *The Negroland Revisited: Discovery and Invention of the Sudanese Middle Ages* (Helsinki, 2000), 167–214, especially on Leo's knowledge of sub-Saharan Africa. On Leo's early translators, two items should be consulted: Oumelbanine Zhiri, 'Leo Africanus, Translated and Betrayed', in *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski et al. (Ottawa, 2001), 161–74, and Crofton Black, 'Leo Africanus's *Descrittione dell'Africa* and its Sixteenth-Century Translations', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65.1 (2002), 262–72. Unfortunately much other English work on Leo is reliant on the faulty 1600 translation by John Pory. For a non-scholarly work of travel that follows in Leo's footsteps, see Nicholas Jubber, *The Timbuktu School for Nomads: Across the Sahara in the Shadow of Jihad* (London, 2017).

The major work on al-Wazzan is mostly in other European languages; above all one should mention Oumelbanine Zhiri, *L'Afrique au miroir de l'Europe: fortunes de Jean Léon l'Africain à la Renaissance* (Geneva, 1991), much of it about the *Cosmography*'s readers; Dietrich Rauchenberger, *Johannes Leo der Afrikaner* (see list of editions above), an impressive study with a focus on Books Four and Five; and the conference volume *Léon l'Africain*, ed. François Pouillon et al. (Paris, 2009), especially the early chapters. Valuable shorter items include Federico Cresti, 'Il Maghreb centrale agli inizi del XVI secolo: Strutture

politiche, economie urbane e territorio nella *Descrittione dell'Africa* di Giovanni Leone Africano', *Africa* 53.2 (1998), 218–38, and Oumelbanine Zhiri, '"Il compositore" ou l'autobiographie éclatée de Jean Léon l'Africain', in *Le voyage des théories*, ed. Ali Benmakhlouf (Casablanca, 2000), 63–80.

For work on subjects related to this book, the following may be of interest (we have limited our list to accessible English titles). On Maghribi history, Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge, 1987), remains a classic and reliable account; see also Matthew T. Racine, *A Most Opulent Iliad: Expansion, Confrontation and Cooperation on the Southern Moroccan Frontier (1505–1542)* (San Diego, CA, 2012), Maya Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State: The Marinid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco* (Princeton, 2000), especially the chapters on the origins of the Berbers, and on the Moroccan institutions of the madrasa, *waqf* and taxation, and Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge, 2012). An older but very readable account of Fez in the period leading up to Leo is Roger Le Tourneau, *Fez in the Age of the Marinides*, trans. Besse Alberta Clement (Norman, OK, 1961). On Islam in Africa, see Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Indianapolis, 2013). For architecture, see Jonathan M. Bloom's splendid *Architecture of the Islamic West: North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, 700–1800* (New Haven, 2020). For West Africa, see, in addition to the works by Hunwick and Masonen mentioned above, two recent books, Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton, 2018), and Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago, 2019). For those interested in the primary sources, the indispensable English volume is *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, ed. N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins (Cambridge, 1981), still in print. On the Berbers, see Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* The Peoples of Africa (Oxford, 1996) and Ramzi Rouighi's revisionist *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib* (Philadelphia, 2019). Kathleen Bickford

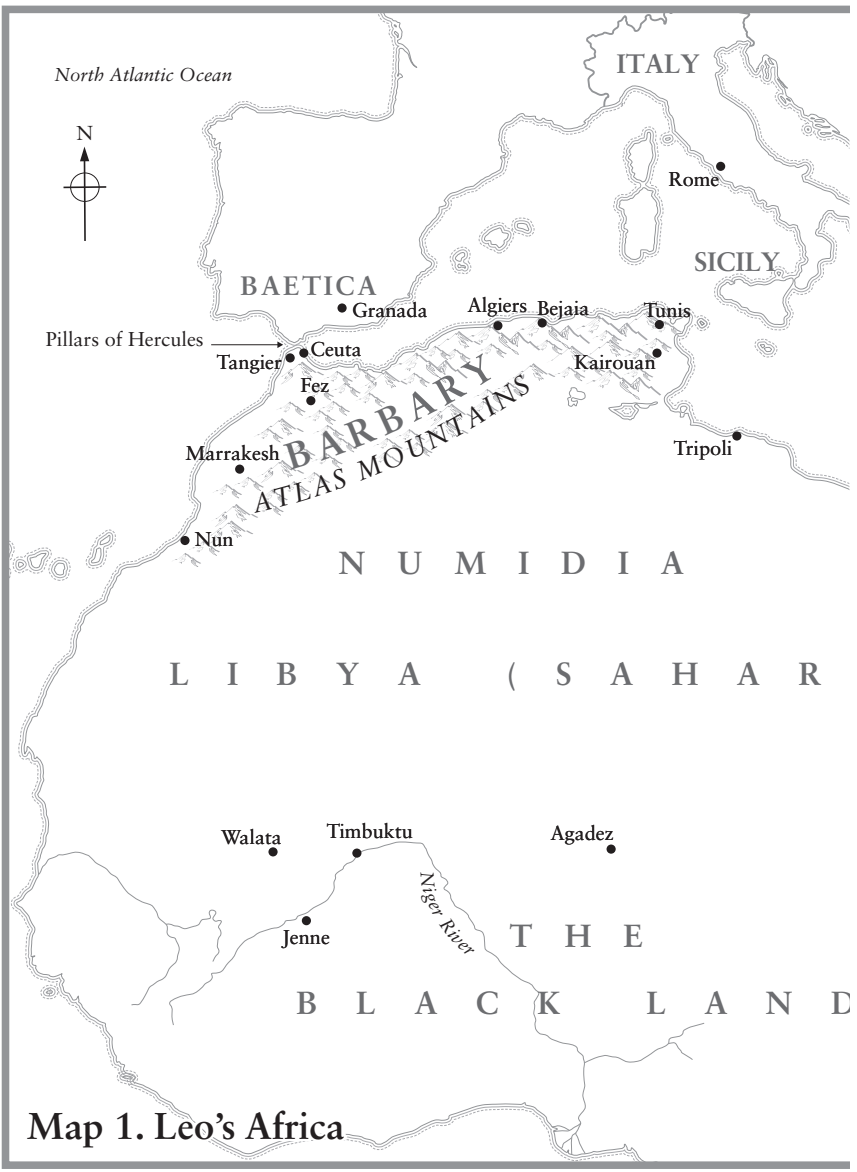
Berzock, ed., *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange Across Medieval Saharan Africa* (Princeton and Oxford, 2019), is a lavishly illustrated guide to the culture of the Sahara as Leo would have known it. On Mamluk Egypt see Carl F. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981) and *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, NY, 1994).

Finally, in our endnotes, we occasionally adduce other early accounts of Africa and its history, in translation where possible. These are: (1) Abu Salim al-Ayyashi, *Voyage de l'Imam el-'Aïachi depuis le Pays des Aït-'Aïach, dans le Maroc, jusqu'à Tripoli, et retour*, trans. Adrien Berbrugger, in *Exploration scientifique de l'Algérie*, 40 vols (Paris, 1844–81), IX, 1–164; (2) Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325–1354*, 5 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1958–2000); (3) Pierre Belon, *Travels in the Levant*, ed. Alexandra Merle, trans. James Hogarth (Kilkerran, 2012); (4) Alvise Cadamosto, 'Voyage from Venice to Cape St Vincent' (1455), in Robert Kerr, ed., *A General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels Arranged in Systematic Order*, 18 vols (Edinburgh, 1811–24), II, 203–45; (5) Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti peregrinationem*, ed. Konrad Dieterich Hassler, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1843); (6) Jean-Baptiste Gramaye, *Africa illustrata* (Tournai, 1622); (7) Muhammad al-Idrisi, *Géographie*, trans. Pierre-Amédée Jaubert, 2 vols (Paris, 1836–40); (8) Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Durar al-'Uqud al-Faridah* (Beirut, 2002); (9) Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Mas'udi, *Les prairies d'or*, trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and Abel Pavet de Courteille, 9 vols (Paris, 1861); (10) Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de situ orbis*, ed. and trans. George H. T. Kimble (London, 1937); and (11) Arnold Von Harff, *The Pilgrimage*, trans. Malcolm Letts (London, 1946).

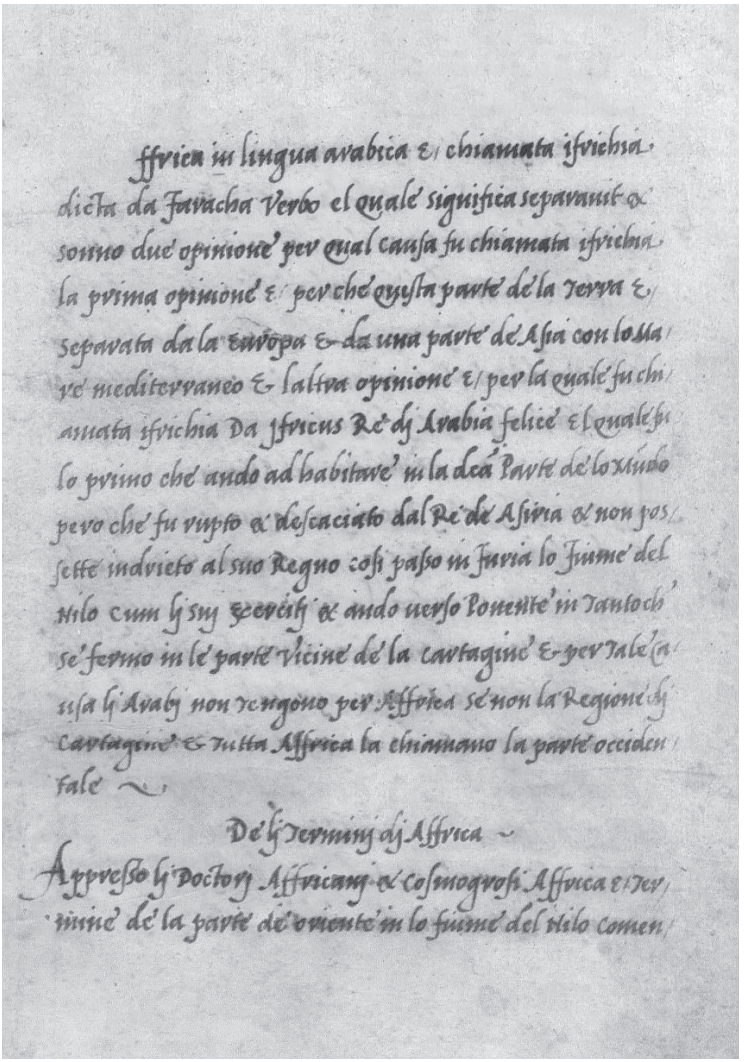
Acknowledgements

In a pandemic period of global isolation and confinement, it has been the greatest pleasure to correspond with the world's experts about a treatise that embodies travel and exploration. For their insights into linguistic, historical, cultural, architectural and other aspects of the *Cosmography*, and for their support and encouragement of the project more generally, we'd like to thank Mohammad Al Attar, Mohamad Ballan, Lars Behrisch, Francisco Bethencourt, Jonathan Bloom, Lucinda Byatt, Jeremy Dell, Rachel Holmes, Shamil Jeppie, Matthew Keegan, Dilwyn Knox, David Nirenberg, Valentina Pugliano, Ramzi Rouighi, Ulinka Rublack, Lameen Souag, Nicholas Warner, Natalie Zemon Davis, Oumelbanine Zhiri, and most of all Andrea Donnini, who fielded dozens of textual and critical queries. We'd also like to thank library staff at the Biblioteca Comunale Centrale di Milano and the British Library for their assistance. The translation and research were supported in part by Anthony's year-long fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, for which we are both profoundly grateful.

THE COSMOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY OF AFRICA



Map 1. Leo's Africa



Affrica in lingua arabica è chiamata africhia
detta da Faracha Verbo el quale significa separauit &
sonno due opinione per qual causa fu chiamata africhia
la prima opinione è per che questa parte de la terra è
separata da la Europa & da una parte de Asia con lo ma
re mediterraneo & laltra opinione è per la quale fu chi
amata africhia Da Afrikus Re de Arabia felice el quale fu
lo primo che andò ad habitare in la detta parte de lo mundo
però che fu rupto & descaciato dal Re de Asiria & non pos
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usa li Arabi non tengono per Affrica se non la Regione di
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tale ~

De li termini di Affrica ~

Appresso li Doctori Affricani & cosmografi Affrica è ter
minata de la parte de oriente in lo fiume del nilo comen

First page of The Cosmography and Geography of Africa, *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, MS V.E. 953. The illuminated initial A has not been added.*

BOOK 1.
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Africa is called in Arabic *Ifriqiya*, from the word *faraqa*, meaning 'he separated'. There are two opinions on the origin of this name. The first is that this part of the world is separated from Europe and Asia by the Mediterranean; the second is that it was named after Ifricus,[1] king of Arabia Felix, who was the first to settle in that part of the world, since he had been defeated and driven out by the king of Assyria and could not return to his kingdom. Ifricus raced across the Nile with his army and travelled west to the part near Carthage, which is why the Arabs call only the region of Carthage 'Africa', whereas they call the whole of Africa 'the Western Part'.[2]

1.2. The boundaries of Africa

According to African scholars and cosmographers, Africa is bounded to the east by the Nile, stretching north from the tributaries of the lake in the Gaoga desert, to the lowlands of Egypt where the Nile flows into the Mediterranean. It is bounded by the Nile Delta to the north, extending west to the straits of the Pillars of Hercules.[3] The western border stretches from these straits near the ocean down to Nun, the furthest town of Libya on the ocean. The southern border extends from Nun, along the ocean that surrounds the whole of Africa, as far as the Gaoga deserts.

1.3. The divisions of Africa

According to our scholars and cosmographers, Africa is divided into four parts – Barbary, Numidia, Libya and the Black Land. Barbary begins to the east at Mount Meiies,[4] the furthest point of the Atlas range 300 miles from Alexandria; bounded to the north by the Mediterranean, it extends from Mount Meiies as far as the Pillars of Hercules. The western part runs from those Pillars along the ocean to the other end of the Atlas mountains, that is, where the Maghrib begins on the ocean near the town of Massa. The southern part is bounded by the Atlas mountains, on the side facing the Mediterranean. This is the noblest part of Africa, where the cities are, and where the people are white and capable of reason.

The second part is called Numidia in Latin, but the Arabs call it Bilad al-Jarid, that is, 'the Land of Dates'. It begins in the east at al-Wahat, a region 100 miles from Egypt, and extends west as far as Nun on the ocean; to the north it is bounded by the south-facing Atlas mountains, while the southern regions are bordered by the sands of the Libyan desert. The Arabs naturally call all the lands in which dates are grown by the same name since they are all of one terrain.

The third part is called Libya, though Arabic has no word for it but *Sahra*, 'desert'. It begins from the Nile to the east, on the borders of al-Wahat, and extends west to the ocean; to the north it borders Numidia, where the dates are grown, and to the south it borders the Black Land.

The fourth part, the Black Land, begins to the east at the kingdom of Gaoga and extends west to Walata on the ocean. To the north it borders the Libyan desert and is bound by the ocean to the south. These are places unknown to us, but, even so, we have acquired much knowledge of them from the merchants who venture from these regions to the kingdom of Timbuktu. Through the middle of the Black Land flows the river Niger, which issues from a huge lake in a desert called Seu to the east, and extends west until it enters the ocean. According to our cosmographers the Niger is a branch of the Nile that vanishes

underground and re-emerges at the lake. Others say that it issues from the western region of the mountains and flows east into a lake; but this opinion is false, because we have sailed from the kingdom of Timbuktu in the east, following the water down to the kingdoms of Jenne or Mali west of Timbuktu.

The principal kingdoms of the Blacks are those on the river Niger. It should be noted that the part of the Black Land lying across the Nile – that is, from its eastern bank to the Indian Sea, bordering the Red Sea to the north, in other words the area adjoining the straits of Arabia Felix[5] – is not held by our cosmographers to be part of Africa, for many reasons given in their long treatises. Latin speakers call this region Ethiopia. From it come certain friars whose faces are branded with fire, whom one sees throughout Europe, especially in Rome. This country is governed by a ruler like a patriarch whom the Italians call *Pretegianni* (Prester John).[6] Most people in this region are Christians, but there is a Muslim ruler who controls a large part.

1.4. The divisions of the kingdoms of the four parts of Africa

Barbary is divided into four kingdoms. The first is Marrakesh, which is divided into seven regions: Haha, Sous, Guzula, Marrakesh, Doukkala, Haskoura and Tadla. The second is Fez, which also has seven regions: Tamasna, Fez, Azgar, al-Habat, er-Rif, Garet, Al Haouz. The third is Tlemcen, which has three regions: the mountains, Tenes and Algiers. The fourth is Tunis, which has four regions: Bejaia, Constantine, Tripoli and Zeb, which is partly in Numidia. The region of Bejaia was always in contention between the kings of Tunis and Tlemcen; in modern times it was made a kingdom by itself, until the capital city was captured by Count Pedro Navarro in the name of Ferdinand of Spain.

1.5. The divisions of Numidia, the Land of Dates

This part of Africa is less well developed, and so cosmographers and historians have not assigned any kingdoms to it, since its regions and settlements are very far from one another. For instance, Tesset, a Numidian town of 400 homes, is 300 miles across the Libyan desert from the nearest settlement; such a thing hardly merits the title of a kingdom. There are, however, some places like the other regions of Africa in regard to the quality of their settlements, such as the state of Sijilmasa in the part of Numidia near Mauretania, the state of Zeb near the kingdom of Bejaia, and Bilad al-Jarid near Tunis; therefore the author will briefly note these places, one by one, in the third book of this work. The rest, beginning in the Maghrib, are: Tesset, Waddan, Ifran, Akka, Draa, Tabelbala, Todgha, Ferkla, Sijilmasa, Beni Gumi, Figuig, Tuat, Tesebit, Tigurarin, M'zab, Tuggurt, Ouargla.

The province of Zeb has five cities: Biskra, al-Borgi, Nefta, Tolga and Doucen. Bilad al-Jarid also has five cities: Tozeur, Gafsa, Nefzawa, al-Hammah and Gabes. East of these provinces are the isle of Jerba, Gharyan, Msallata, Misrata, Tawergha, Ghadames, Fezzan, Awjila, Bardoa and al-Wahat. These are the names of the famous places of Numidia, from the ocean in the west to the borders of the Nile.

1.6. The divisions of the deserts between Numidia and the Black Land

Our people do not give these deserts any names, but divide them into five parts. Each part is named after the people who go there to graze their flocks, in other words the Numidians,[7] who are of five tribes: Zanaga,[8] Wanziga, Terga, Lamta, Bardoa. There are also areas with particular names from some good or bad quality, such as Azawad, a desert named for its wretched dryness, and Aïr, named for its temperate fertility.

1.7. The divisions of the Black Land, kingdom by kingdom

The Black Land is divided into many kingdoms; some of them are unknown and unvisited, but the author will explain which we have visited and which the merchants visited but not us. He himself has been to fifteen kingdoms of the Black Land, but there are three times as many, some known and neighbouring those he has visited, others unknown and far away. Here are the names of the kingdoms he has been to, beginning in the west and extending east and south: Walata, Jenne, Mali, Timbuktu, Gao, Gobir, Agadez, Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Zamfara, Wangara, Bornu, Gaoga, Nubia. These are the fifteen kingdoms, most of which are on the river Niger. Merchants who journey from Walata to Cairo travel through these kingdoms, which is a safe route, though longer. These kingdoms are far from one another, separated either by desert or by the Niger. Formerly each kingdom had its own ruler, but in the author's time they were all controlled by three powers – the greater part ruled by the king of Timbuktu, a smaller part by the king of Bornu, and another part by the king of Gaoga. The ruler of Dongola also had a little state of his own bordering these kingdoms, and to the south are many other kingdoms: Bito, Jemiam, Dauma, Medra, Gorhan.[9] Those that have good governors and rulers are rich and often visited, but the others are worse than animals.

1.8. The settlements of Africa and the races of their inhabitants

According to the cosmographers and historians, Africa was formerly uninhabited, except the Black Land; Barbary and Numidia remained uninhabited for many centuries. All the inhabitants, that is, the whites, were named al-Barbar, derived, according to many scholars, from *barbara*, a word that means 'mumbled' in Latin, since the African language is meaningless to the Arabs and sounds like animal noises.[10] Some say that

barbar is a repetition, for *bar* in Arabic means the desert. They say that long ago, King Ifricus, when he was defeated by the Assyrians or Ethiopians, fled into Egypt with his enemies in pursuit; unable to defend himself, he took counsel with his people on how to provide for their safety, and everyone cried out *Al-bar bar!*, that is, 'The desert, the desert!', meaning that their only recourse was to cross the Nile into the African desert. This explanation agrees with those who say that the Africans are descended from the people of Arabia Felix.

1.9. The origins of the Africans

Historians disagree about the origins of the Africans. Some say they come from the Philistines and were driven out long ago by the Assyrians, fleeing into Africa, which they found pleasant and fertile, so they stopped there. Others say they come from the Sabaeans, a people of Arabia Felix, who, as we said above, were driven out either by the Assyrians or by the Ethiopians. Others say that the Africans were native to some part of Asia, and that their enemies declared war on them; fleeing towards Greece, which was then uninhabited, they were pursued by their foes, so they crossed the sea of Morea[11] and arrived in Africa, where they stopped, while their enemies stopped in Greece. This discussion concerns only the origins of the white Africans, that is, those who inhabit Barbary and Numidia, but the Africans of the Black Land are all descended from Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah; the white and black Africans are therefore entirely of the same origin, since they all come from the Philistines. The Philistines are also descended from Mizraim, son of Cush, and also from Sheba, son of Raamah, son of Cush.[12] There are so many other opinions that I cannot remember them all, for it has been ten years since I've seen or opened any work of history at all.

1.10. The divisions of the white Africans into many peoples

The inhabitants of Africa are divided into five peoples: the Sanhaja,[13] the Masmuda, the Zanata, the Hawwara and the Ghomara. The Masmuda live in the western part of the Atlas mountains, from Haha to the River of the Slaves;[14] others live on the south side of the Atlas, others in the plains. They have four provinces: Haha, Sous, Guzula and the region of Marrakesh. The Ghomara live in the mountains of Mauretania on the Mediterranean, and they rule the entire coast of er-Rif from the Pillars of Hercules east to the borders of the kingdom of Tlemcen, which in Latin is called Caesarea. The Masmuda and the Ghomara live by themselves, separate from other peoples.

The other peoples are mingled in the settlements all across Africa, but they can tell each other apart and are always at war among themselves, especially those in Numidia. Many authorities say that these five peoples once lived in tents in the countryside, but that long ago they fought a war, and all those who lost retreated into walled towns and became the vassals of those who remained in the countryside. This is proven by the fact that many of those in the country speak the same way as those in the towns; for instance, the Zanata in the country speak like the Zanata in the towns, and likewise with the others.[15]

These three races or peoples – the Zanata, the Hawwara and the Sanhaja – are all found in the countryside of Tamasna, alternating between peace and war following their past rivalries. Their princes reigned throughout Africa; the Zanata, for instance, drove out the house of Idris, the true rulers and founders of Fez. They were of a tribe called the Miknasa, but then the Maghrawa, another tribe of Zanata who lived in Numidia, arrived and drove the Miknasa from the kingdom of Fez. Some time later there came from the Numidian desert a Sanhaja tribe called the Lamtuna; they drove the Zanata from Fez, despoiled the entire region of Tamasna, and exterminated every tribe in Tamasna except those of their own stock, whom they made to live in Doukkala.[16] It was the princes of the Lamtuna who built

the city of Marrakesh. Then al-Mahdi, a preacher of the Harga, a Masmuda tribe, rebelled and kicked the Lamtuna out of the kingdom. When the preacher died, one of his disciples was elected, 'Abd al-Mu'min of the Beni Ouriaghel, a Sanhaja tribe;[17] the kingdom remained in his house for around twenty years and he ruled almost all of Africa. Then he was deposed by the Beni Marin, a Zanata tribe, and the kingdom belonged to them for seventy years before they were expelled by the Beni Wattas, a Lamtuna tribe, who had existed for the entire time that the Beni Marin ruled. The Beni Marin constantly waged war against the Beni Zayyan, the house that ruled Tlemcen, from the Maghrawa tribe of the Zanata. And so the Beni Marin often fought with the Hafsid kings of Tunis, who belonged to the Hintata tribe of the Masmuda.

From all this, anyone can see how each of these peoples of Africa have played their part in these regions. It is true that the Ghomara and Hawwara peoples did not vie for dominance, although they did rule in particular regions, as can be seen from the chronicles of the Africans. This period when all these tribes ruled came after they had joined the Muslim sect. Before this they all lived apart in the countryside, each group in the desert or towns favouring their own faction; the countryfolk raised animals while the townsfolk plied their trades and farmed the land.

The five peoples are divided into 600 tribes, as is seen in the family tree of the Africans, a work by Ibn ar-Raqiq, the chronicler of Africa.[18] Many historians hold that the present king of Timbuktu, and the former kings of Mali and of Agadez, are descended from the Zanaga people, who live in the desert.

1.11. The diversity and characteristics of the African language

All the peoples mentioned above are divided into hundreds of tribes and thousands of settlements. They share a language they call *agual amazigh*, which means 'the noble tongue', whereas the Arabs of Africa call it 'the Berber tongue', that is, the native African language. It is distinct from and different to other languages,

but it contains some words taken from Arabic, which some see as evidence that the Africans are descended from the Sabaeans, the people of Arabia Felix. Others hold that these Arabic words were found in the African language only after the Arabs invaded and dominated Africa; however, the people were so ignorant and illiterate that there is no authority to support either side. There are variations in the pronunciation and meanings of words. Those who are nearer the Arabs and deal with them have a great number of Arabic words. Almost all the Ghomara people speak a corrupt Arabic; many Hawwara tribes also speak corrupt Arabic, since they lived with the Arabs for a long time.

In the Black Land they speak various languages, one of which they call the Songhay tongue, spoken in many regions such as Walata, Timbuktu, Jenne, Mali and Gao. Another is called the Gobir tongue,[19] spoken in Gobir, Kano, Katsina, Zazzau and Wangara. A third[20] is spoken in the kingdom of Bornu, and it is similar to that of Gaoga. A fourth is spoken in the kingdom of Nubia, which is a sort of mixture of Arabic, Chaldean and Egyptian.[21]

However, in all the maritime cities of Africa from the Mediterranean to the Atlas mountains, the inhabitants speak corrupt Arabic, except in the kingdom of Marrakesh, where they speak the true Berber language, just as in the towns of Numidia near Mauretania and Caesarea. But those near the kingdoms of Tunis and Tripoli all speak corrupt Arabic.

1.12. The Arabs who live in the cities of Africa

A huge number of Arabs – 80,000 nobles and commoners – arrived in Africa in an army commanded by the third caliph 'Uthman (ibn 'Affan) in AH 24 (AD 645). When they had acquired many regions, almost all the princes and nobles returned to Arabia, except the general of the army, 'Uqba ibn Nafi', who stopped there and built the city of Kairouan.[22] For he was constantly wary of being defeated or betrayed in that coastal town of Tunis, suspecting that aid for the Africans would arrive from Sicily or Apulia; and so he retreated, with all the treasures he had