

A summary and ethnographic evaluation of

Dietrich Rauchenberger's

## **Johannes Leo der Afrikaner**

Seine Beschreibung des Raumes zwischen Nil und

Niger nach dem Urtext

With special emphasis on the *Montanari* of *Borno*

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*Bibliographical reference and publisher's footnote*<sup>1</sup>

**Rauchenberger, D.**, (1999): Johannes Leo der Afrikaner. Seine Beschreibung des Raumes zwischen Nil und Niger nach dem Urtext. *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana*, editors Eckart Otto and Siegbert Uhlig, volume 13 (499 pages), Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Rauchenberger read this text in 2002 when it was originally written and explicitly appreciated it to be published electronically then. Because I still think that Rauchenbergers's work has not yet received sufficient attention among English reading scholars of the region, for example his critical assessment of John Pory's English translation from Florianus' Latin version (see page 10), we have decided to re-publish this book description as an ISBN version.

## Introduction

I want to recommend this first edition of selections of the rediscovered handwritten manuscript of Leo Africanus' *Cosmographia* to a wider international readership. It is a scholarly tradition in Germany to be interested in Leo Africanus' work which goes back as far as the original manuscript. The German theologian, Jacob Ziegler, read it in Rome in 1529 and produced a bibliographical reference in his *Description of Egypt*<sup>2</sup> (see Rauchenberger, page 160). The second German who represents an important link to Leo Africanus was the orientalist, Johann Albrecht von Widmanstetter<sup>3</sup>. His attempt to visit Leo Africanus in 1532, in Tunis, provides us with the last historical trace of Leo. Georg Wilhelm Lersbach<sup>4</sup>, a German theologian, after centuries of editorial inactivity, published, in 1805, a new translation of the first published version of 1550.

The reference to the *Urtext* (original text) in Rauchenberger's title indicates that he deals with the old handwritten manuscript *Cosmographia & Geographia De Affrica. Roma 1526*. The manuscript was apparently discovered by Angela Codazzi<sup>5</sup> in 1931 and subsequently acquired by the Italian Ministry of Education from the Libreria Antiquaria Ulrico Hoepli in Rome. Since then the document with the signature Ms. VE 953 has been in the possession of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II in Rome. It predates the *Descrittione dell'Affrica* of Giovanni Leone Africano, which was printed by the Venetian publisher Giovanni Battista Ramusio in 1550.

The original manuscript is known as the *Cosmographia* (in contrast to the *Descrittione* published by Ramusio) and consists of 930 pages, but Rauchenberger has chosen to deal with one fifth of it, the part about black Africa. Rauchenberger divides his book into a study of the new biographical data on Leo Africanus found in the original manuscript and the translation of his *Terra de li Nigri* and its comparison mainly with the Ramusio edition.

Rauchenberger's book consists not only of descriptions of thoroughly researched historical events around the life and writings of Leo Africanus but also contains many tables demonstrating the results of his analysis. He has also produced a list of Arabic manuscripts from the Vatican library, which Leo Africanus read between 1518 and 1521. In addition he has published facsimile copies of 42 pages of the handwritten manuscript VE 953 and a transcription of Leo's travels in the Sahara

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<sup>2</sup> Ziegler, Jacob. 1532. Quae intus continentur Syria ... Palestina ... Arabia ... Aegyptus ... Schondia ... Holmiae ..., Argentoratum.

<sup>3</sup> Widmanstetter, Johann Albrecht. 1555. Liber sacrosancti Evangelii de Jesu Christo Domino et Deo nostro, Wien.

<sup>4</sup> Lersbach, Georg Wilhelm (editor and translator). 1805. Johann Leo's des Africaners Beschreibung von Africa. Aus dem Italiänischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen, von ..., Erster (*und einziger*) Band, welcher die Übersetzung des Textes enthält. Herborn.

<sup>5</sup> Codazzi, Angela. 1949 and 1952. Dell'unico manoscritto della « Cosmographia dell'Affrica » di Giovanni Leone l'Africano, in *Comptes rendus du Congrès Internationale de Géographie*, Lisbonne 1949, vol 4, Lissabon 1952, p. 225f.

and sub-Saharan Africa. The transcription is accompanied by a facing translation into German of this part of the *Cosmographia*.

Apart from wanting to emphasize Leo's academic capacity and highlighting new insights coming from the *Cosmographia*, this book description concentrates, not so much on the urban civilisations of the Sudan (like e.g. *Tombutto* or *Songai*), but more on the sections of populations Leo described as uncivilised, in particular, the montagnards of *Borno*. The reason for this focus stems from my ethnographic orientation, having myself worked for many years in the northern Mandara mountains of northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. Leo Africanus is one of the first to mention the *Medra* (presumably Mandara) and I believe that Leo's montagnards of *Borno* are the ancestors of the inhabitants of the Mandara mountains of today. His journey<sup>6</sup> lasted about six months and he presumably visited *Borno* sometime in 1513 where he spent altogether one month (page 53).

The book (pages 3-26) begins with an introduction to the early phase of the age of discoveries (around 1500), giving special consideration to slavery in Europe, European pirates, diplomacy and existing knowledge of inner Africa. Leo Africanus' work (Ramusio's *Descrittione*) appeared under ideal circumstances at the height of the Italian Renaissance after a transitional period at the end of the Middle Ages. The schism of Avignon was a matter of the past and Rome was back in control. Printing already existed and Pope Leo X promoted the arts and literature (page 26).

### *Biographical data*

Rauchenberger thoroughly discusses the existing records and publications concerning the circumstances of Leo Africanus' birth as al-Hassan al-Wazzan in the kingdom of Granada most likely sometime in autumn 1494 (page 36). Leo Africanus writes in the *Cosmographia* that he remembers only little about Granada and Rauchenberger (page 37) maintains that he moved with his father to Fez before the age of four. He argues that al-Hassan's father was wealthy and independent enough to leave Granada for Fez of his own accord (page 38). This means that al-Hassan received his education in Fez and not in Granada and that he was of a privileged, if not noble social background.

Al-Hassan received the title of a *faqih*, a legal scholar, at a very young age in Fez (page 39). This was also the title, *facchi*, he used in the Vatican (page 39, footnote 169). Al-Hassan visited a Koran school until 1501/02 and one of the Medrassas (*collegio/college*) of Fez until 1506/07. This means that he achieved his *faqih*, an equivalent of a doctor title, at the age of about fourteen (page 42). Ramusio must have thought that he was too young for such a title and therefore changed the

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<sup>6</sup> Leo's second journey across the Sudan started late summer, 1512, in Fez and ended in spring, 1514, in Cairo.

original manuscript by omitting those words and sentences which refer to his scientific methods. Rauchenberger accepts al-Hassan's claim to have received the title of a *faqih* and that it is the equivalent of a *doctorato*<sup>7</sup> (page 43).

Al-Hassan was an envoy of the Sultan of Fez<sup>8</sup> (page 57) on a return mission from Istanbul when captured at sea by the brother of the Bishop of Salamanca (page 63) who was a pirate captain. This was in 1518 and al-Hassan was twenty-four years old (page 60). The name of the Spanish captain was Don Pietro di Bovadiglia (page 64). Captain Bovadiglia had captured a group of Moors several months before at *Cao Salamon* or Capo Samonio on the eastern side of Crete (page 65). His plan was to take them to Rome as a gift for Pope Leo X in order to receive absolution. Among the captured was also an envoy of the king of Tremissen (Tlemcen in Algeria) who was on his way back to Fez from a visit to their Turkish allies. This envoy was presumably al-Hassan (page 64).

In October 1518 al-Hassan was taken to the Castello Sant'Angelo where he met Pope Leo X. Al-Hassan's arrival was one of the most important events of this year in Rome (pages 61/62) and his time there was very productive in intellectual terms. During 1518/19 he already had access to the library of the Vatican where he worked his way through eight major volumes mainly by Coptic and Syrian authors who represented the Christian worldview between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> Century (page 67). Pope Leo X spent most summers at the Castello Sant'Angelo and had close contact with al-Hassan during this time (page 70).

In 1520, at the Epiphany, *al-Hassan al-faqih* (al-Hassan the scholar) was baptised and subsequently freed by Pope Leo X receiving the name *Giovanni Leone de Medicis* (page 74). The choice of the day of the Medici (Epiphany) and the name Giovanni – John the Baptist was the patron of Florence – shows that Pope Leo's decision to baptise and free al-Hassan was driven by political considerations. Leo had freedom of movement outside the Vatican from 1520 onwards (page 85).

Leo Africanus left Rome after Pope Leo X died in December 1521, only one year after he was baptised. Not only Leo Africanus, but also many intellectuals and artists Pope Leo had promoted found themselves suddenly left without much financial and social protection (page 88). Pope Leo was replaced by Hadrian VI (a non-Italian Pope) who came to Rome eight months after his election where he replaced his predecessor's liberal reign with a strict course of moral and financial prudence.

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Melanchton enrolled at the age of 12 and received, in 1513, at the age of 16, his masterate at the University of Tübingen, which was during this time almost the same as a doctorate).

<sup>8</sup> The sultan of Fez needed the help of the powerful Turks against the Portuguese and Spanish.

Leo decided to move to Bologna as a result, and it is believed that it is there that he worked intensively on his *Cosmographia*, from 1524 onwards. He later returned to Rome where he finished the manuscript on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1526 (page 89). Considering his limited mastery of the Italian language, which he had learnt during the previous seven years, this was a remarkable achievement. The *Cosmographia* informs us that Leo Africanus not only spent a considerable time in Bologna but that he also visited Naples and Florence (page 89).

He left Rome some time after 1527 and later moved to Tunis. His decision to leave Italy altogether was presumably influenced by the attack of the soldiers of Charles V who plundered Rome (page 94). This was the end of the Italian Renaissance and the political and social climate had changed in such a way that Leo decided to flee to find refuge in Venice or Naples. Rauchenberger (page 97) opts for a retreat to the north where he might have found refuge under the protection of Cardinal Egidios who had concentrated troops in Viterbo in order to free the Pope. It seems that Leo left a copy of his collection of biographies, *De viris illustribus*, in Viterbo. From there he might have headed for Venice because his most important manuscripts, the *Cosmographia* and the *Vocabularium*, can be traced there only a few years after he might have left for Tunis.

Leo Africanus went to Tunis shortly after with the aim of buying Arabic books (page 96). It is believed that he decided not to return from Tunis and that he presumably died there only some years later. He can be indirectly traced in Tunis, in 1532, through a note of the German, Johann Albrecht von Widmanstetter (pages 98/99), who had plans to visit him there but never did. This disproves the belief of many scholars that Leo Africanus was still alive in Tunis around 1555 (page 100). Rauchenberger demonstrates that this mistake was based on a misinterpretation of Widmanstetter (see footnote 466) and points out that this had already been corrected by Lorsbach in 1805. Leo presumably abstained from taking his Italian writings to Tunis since this would have been too dangerous.

### *History of the Cosmographia*

Among Leo Africanus' contemporaries (pages 101-116) were: Giovanni Maria de Medicis, a famous composer and musician of Jewish descent and like him adopted by the Pope, Elia Maronita, a Lebanese monk and his calligrapher, and Jacob Mantino, a Jew who encouraged him to produce a trilingual dictionary.

Leo's writings are in Arabic, Latin and Italian. The only certain manuscript before his capture in 1518 is a collection of Arabic epitaphs from 1505. While Leo Africanus gives a clear reference to the existence of such a collection, the reference to an Arabic manuscript of his expedition to

southern Morocco in 1514/15 remains uncertain (page 124). Rauchenberger tries to prove that Leo's section on Morocco was based on a pre-existing Arabic manuscript (page 117).

Most of Leo's surviving works were written after 1518. They consist of an Arabic version of the Epistles of St Paul (1521), an Italian-Arabic-Latin dictionary (1524), some short biographies of Arabic and Jewish scholars (1527), an Arabic metrics<sup>9</sup> (1527) and, of course, the *Cosmographia* (1526). Leo's writing (altogether more than 1300 pages) allows us to assume the existence of an underlying greater plan in which the *Cosmographia* seems to feature as the centrepiece, but, unfortunately, this plan never reached completion (page 125). However, considering the short period of time (1519-1527) in which most of this was achieved, Leo Africanus must be seen as a very active and accomplished academic writer.

The book examines Leo Africanus' hand-written manuscript of the *Cosmographia* and concludes (page 135) that Ramusio used the manuscript VE 953 as setting copy. The manuscript was the work of two men. One of them dictated and corrected while the other wrote it down. Both spoke Arabic as their mother tongue. The first one was Leo himself while the other was a man called Elia Ben Abraham, a talented calligrapher (page 132). Rauchenberger argues that the section on Morocco was reproduced from an existing manuscript – most likely in Arabic – and, that the manuscript VE 953 had been in England between 1820 and 1931.

Elia Ben Abraham, known as Elia Maronita, was a Lebanese monk (page 113) who had already assisted Leo in 1521 in producing an Arabic translation of the Epistles of St Paul. Elias was about Leo's age and had arrived in Rome around 1515, at the age of twenty. He learnt Latin and Italian on the orders of Pope Leo X and he introduced the study of Syrian (Chaldaean) into European academia. Apparently his Italian was not very good and it is recorded from his work with Leo that he often confused the vowels *e* and *i* (page 114).

The English cover of what would become VE 953 in 1931 allows us to assume that the manuscript was in England for about 100 years. The leather cover (page 135) carries the tiny stamp, *Bound by Mackenzie*, the trademark of the famous bookbinder, John Mackenzie, who worked in the West End of London from 1811 onwards. However, the cover could not have been made before 1820 because the copy of a French text – a short biography of Leo Africanus by Eyriés which was published in 1819 – bound into the front, had only appeared the year before (page 134).

The fate of the manuscript is then discussed in greater detail (page 136). Starting from the date of its completion in March 1526, the German humanist, Jacob Ziegler, can be identified. He studied the

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<sup>9</sup> Theory of Arabic measurements.

manuscript in 1529. Next, in 1545, Ramusio sent a text on Africa to Cardinal Pietro Bembo, private secretary of Pope Leo X. This can only have been a copy of the *Cosmographia*. In 1546, Girolamo Gastaldi, a cartographer, used information from the *Cosmographia* to produce his latest Ptolemaic Africa map and in 1549, one year before the publication of the Ramusio version, Guillaume Postel, a French orientalist, uses elements of the *Cosmographia* to enhance his map of *Cano* (Kano in northern Nigeria).

The gap between 1550 and 1820 can possibly be closed with Massignon<sup>10</sup> who refers, in a footnote, to a ‘handwritten copy of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century’ in Venice (page 138). Apparently, the reference leads to the Benedictine abbot Giovanni Benedetto Mittarelli, who, before 1777, cited the conclusion of Ramusio’s *Descrittione* by using the words of Leo’s original *Cosmographia*. This means that the *Cosmographia* was in Venice from 1529 till 1777 (as already mentioned above, Leo presumably left the *Cosmographia* in Venice when he finally departed to Tunis). Between 1777 and 1820 the *Cosmographia* must have found its way to England before it was returned to Italy in 1931.

Rauchenberger also discusses the idea of an original Arabic manuscript of the *Cosmographia* (page 137) and argues that such a manuscript might well have existed in parts, such as, the Moroccan part. He is of the opinion that such a manuscript might have been lost at sea during the transport of sections of the library of Vincenzo Pinelli from Venice to Naples at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The other possibility is that Leo Africanus took the original Arabic manuscript (or at least field notes in Arabic) with him to Tunis since Arabic writing would not have raised suspicion there.

#### *Comparison of the original manuscript with the Ramusio version*

Ramusio admittedly changed Leo’s text considerably and he explains this by writing in a letter to his friend Hieronymus Fracastoro that ...*he [Leo Africanus] translated his book from the Arabic as well as he could* (see Rauchenberger, page 139). As well as purely grammatical improvements Ramusio also tried to produce a shorter and more concise text. He used, in his section on *Libia* and *Paese de li Nigri*, in average about a quarter fewer words than Leo Africanus (page 140).

Ramusio’s editorial interventions mainly aimed for a greater ease of use and reduction of costs. Some areas of the text were shortened by Ramusio by up to 40%. But not only was the text shortened considerably but also the meaning of words and whole paragraphs were changed. Ramusio also made additions to the text, although many less than his omissions.

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<sup>10</sup> Massignon – Maroc, p. 4: *Une copie manuscrite du XVI siècle, l’abregeant pour certains détails, se trouve à la BN sous le no 902 du fonds italien. Autre copie du XVI siècle signalée ap. Mittarelli Biblioth. Codicum Mss. Monasterii S. Michaelis Venetiarum, Venise 1779, p. 680.*



In the Sahara and black Africa section of the printed version itself (the *Descrittione*) there are 85 differences in contents in comparison with the manuscript (the *Cosmographia*). Rauchenberger adds to this about 50 additional similar changes outside the actual section on *Libia* and *Terra de li Nigri* but which are nonetheless concerned with the region. However, these changes are not always on the same level. While half of the changes are the result of errors, the other half are influenced by personal opinion and Ramusio's worldview. In some cases, Ramusio's intention was to change things deliberately because he might have thought that potential readers would otherwise not understand.

Rauchenberger (pages 141-144) lists the different types of changes and categorises them, e.g. (A) unintended mistakes, like: *putio* = well (Leo Africanus) becomes *piano* = plain (Ramusio), or (C) distorting additions by Ramusio, like: *as I saw with my own eyes*. The opinion of many scholars that Ramusio improved Leo Africanus' original manuscript cannot be upheld. Changes made by Ramusio are often found in sections of the *Cosmographia* which are difficult to read (page 144). This criticism particularly applies to the *introduction to the land of the blacks* and *Tombutto*. This is the case to a lesser extent in *Gaogao* and *Nube* whereas the Sahara, the area west of *Tombutto* and the Hausa region, has hardly been changed by Ramusio (page 145).

The changes dealing with personalities and black African civilisations are particularly significant because they represent areas of conflicting worldviews. For example (page 146, footnote 659), when Leo Africanus compares the table manners of an *Italian nobleman* with those of any *African nobleman*, Ramusio changes the comparison to the *poorest Italian nobleman* and the *most powerful African ruler*.

The most important differences between the *Cosmographia* (1526) and the *Descrittione* (1550) can be summarised into three main areas of concern (page 147):

1. to increase the social distance to Africa and its inhabitants, particularly the black populations
2. to reduce the reflexivity and informality (*die menschlichen Aspekte*) in Leo's writing, and
3. to make aspects of informality sound unfavourable

It seems that the main intention of Ramusio as the editor and publisher of Leo's work on Africa was to distance Leo Africanus from his social and geographical closeness to black Africa in order to make him more acceptable to European readers of the time. This trend is not reduced by the fact that Ramusio uses in the *Descrittione* the *humanistic I* (the use of the first person singular was very

common during this time) instead of the third person (meaning he: *the author...*) Leo Africanus had chosen (which was more common in Islamic writing) in his *Cosmographia*.

#### *Distribution and impact of Ramusio's Descrittione dell'Africa*

The first edition was the Ramusio version from 1550. Rauchenberger uses the third edition from 1563 for his comparison with the original manuscript. The reason for his choice was that this edition was:

- (1) still a product of Ramusio alone and
- (2) the edition of this kind with the widest distribution and therefore still available today. After the third edition there were five more editions with minor and only formal changes. They appeared in – 1588, 1606, 1613, 1837 and 1978. The new Italian edition of 1978 by Marisa Milanese<sup>11</sup> is apparently very good (page 152).

The first translation of the *Descrittione* appeared in 1556 by Jean Temporal<sup>12</sup> in Lyon. During this time Ramusio was still alive. After Ramusio's death Temporal's edition appeared three more times: 1564 in Leiden and 1830 and 1896 in Paris.

A Spanish edition, by Luis del Mármol y Carvajal<sup>13</sup>, appeared in 1667, and was translated into French the same year. Mármol was a soldier under Charles V and was captured in Tunis in 1535. He spent 22 years in slavery and travelled North Africa during this time. His edition does not seem to be very accurate (Leo Africanus is only mentioned once) and is mixed with his personal experiences.

A completely new French edition of the Ramusio version of the *Descrittione* by Alexis Épaulard<sup>14</sup> appeared in 1956 (after that editor's death and with a commentary by Théodore Monod, Henri Lhote and Raymond Mauny), with a second edition in 1980. Rauchenberger (page 155) points out that Épaulard knew the Roman manuscript (VE 953) but hardly used it for his translation because of the beginning of World War II. However, the Épaulard edition forms the base for a translation of Leo Africanus into Arabic, which is of particular importance in the identification of place names.

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<sup>11</sup> Milanese, Maria (ed). 1978. Giovanni Battista Ramusio. Navigazioni e viaggi, volume primo, Torino.

<sup>12</sup> Temporal, Jean. 1556. Historiale description de l'Afrique tierce partie du monde ... Escrite de nôtre temps par Jean Léon, African ..., Lyon.

<sup>13</sup> Mármol y Carvajal, del Luis. 1573. Descripción general de Affrica, con todos los sucessos de guerras que a avido entre los infieles, y el pueblo Christiano, y entre ellos mesmos desde que Mahoma inve'to su secta, hasta el año del señor mil y quinientos y setenta y uno ..., Granada, 3 volumes (third volume was published in Malaga, 1599).

<sup>14</sup> Épaulard, Alexis, Théodore Monod, Henri Lhote, Raymond Mauny, (eds). 1956 and 1980. Jean-Léon l'Africain, Description de l'Afrique, nouvelle édition traduite de l'Italien par A. Épaulard ..., Paris.

In 1556, after the death of Ramusio, the Latin version of the Dutchman Johannes Blommaerts<sup>15</sup>, who is also known as Florianus, appeared. This translation is rather negative in terms of contents as well as mastery of language. The Latin edition was widely distributed and served John Pory<sup>16</sup> in 1600 as the basis for an English version of Leo Africanus' work. Pory added even more mistakes<sup>17</sup> and therefore increased the distance from Ramusio's *Descrittione* (not to mention the *Cosmographia*). In 1665 the first Dutch translation appeared, also based on the poor Latin version (page 155).

In 1805, a German version appeared which was the first based on the Italian version of Ramusio since Temporal (1556). The orientalist, Georg Wilhelm Lorsbach, taught theology at the *Hohe Schule* in Herborn, Hessen, and was also known as an adviser on oriental languages to the German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The Lorsbach translation has a very good reputation but was not widely distributed (page 156).

The first Spanish translation (apart from the Mármol plagiarism), by Beneites<sup>18</sup>, was published in 1940 in Tetuan, Morocco. Unfortunately, the translation was not complete. A second Spanish translation, by Serafin Fanjul<sup>19</sup> and Nadia Consolani, appeared in 1995 in Barcelona (page 156).

The sequence of editions can be divided into 5 stages (page 157). The first, from 1550 to 1564, is contemporary with the era of the successful expansion of the Mediterranean powers. This period ended in 1578/88 with the defeat of the Portuguese troops in Morocco and of the Spanish Armada by England.

The second phase of publications is between 1588 and 1665 (6 editions altogether), which includes translations into Dutch, Latin and English. This period was a reflection of the shift of European sea powers from the south (Mediterranean powers) to the north.

After this there was no translation or publication of Leo Africanus' work for almost 140 years (between 1665 and 1805). The reason for this was a fairly balanced power situation in Europe, consisting of more or less stable absolute regimes. In France, no book in Arabic characters was printed between 1696 and 1779.

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<sup>15</sup> Florianus, Joannes (translator and editor). 1556. Ioannis Leonis Africani, De totius Africae descriptione libri. IX. ... Antverpiae.

<sup>16</sup> Pory, John (translator and editor). 1600. A geographical History of Africa written in Arabicke and Italian by John Leo a More ... (English version of the *Descrittione*), London.

<sup>17</sup> The problem persists since important works in English are entirely based on Pory. Read, for example about the gold of Bornu in Roland Oliver's *Cambridge History of Africa* (1977:277).

<sup>18</sup> Beneites Cantero, Valentin. 1940. *De la Descripción de Africa y de las cosas notables que en ella se encuentran por Juan Leon Africano* (Al-Hassan Ben Muh. al- Wazzan al-Fasi), Instituto General Franco para la investigación Hispano-arabe, first volume, Sección 6a, No 5, Tetuan (new edition in Tanger, 1952).

<sup>19</sup> Fanjul, Serafin and Nadia Consolani (editors and translators). 1995. *Descripción general del África y de las cosas peregrines que allí hay por Juan León Africano*, Barcelona.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the situation changes and five new editions appear with the first German translation in 1805 followed by a second French translation (1830) and a new Italian edition (1837). The publication of the French and Italian versions can be interpreted in the context of the arrival of the French in Algeria and the English and French editions of 1896 (with very rich commentaries) as marking the end game of the European possession of Africa. During stage one (16<sup>th</sup> Century) and stage four (19<sup>th</sup> Century), European expansion was at the root of the great scholarly and public interest in Africa (page 157).

The last and fifth stage is from 1940 till today which has brought about eight new editions of the *Descrittione* (page 157). Altogether thirty editions have appeared since 1550 in eight languages.

### *Leo Africanus' Cosmographia & Geographia de Affrica*

Rauchenberger is especially concerned with the Sahara and black Africa between Niger and Nile. He explains (page 173) that Leo structured his work into 538 *capitoli* (text elements dealing with a particular location or subject matter), which he combines into 30 *libri* to which he also refers as *tractati* or *compendi*. One *capitolo* can comprise only a few lines or up to fifteen pages. The lengths of an individual *libro* can therefore vary in size quite considerably. The *capitoli* (chapters) as well as the *libri* (books) can be recognised by their titles.

The *libri* are often brought together in *parti* (sections), which seems to happen on three different levels. This turns out to be so complicated that Ramusio did not fully understand Leo's system of *parti* and therefore invented in the *Descrittione* a completely new system. However, the existence of the *Cosmographia* allows us to study and understand Leo Africanus' original way of organising and structuring his work. Rauchenberger claims to have understood Leo's system and reveals its secret in the form of a table (page 174).

Leo Africanus emphasises his intention only to record the most important things in order to avoid boredom among his readers (page 175). Leo does not want to create scepticism and therefore leaves out accounts which may not seem credible because he only knew them from hearsay. He tried to avoid too many comments of a specialist nature, e.g. he keeps a discussion about leprosy brief for this very reason (footnote 788).

Leo's intention to write for a Christian readership becomes obvious in his attempt to translate Islamic notions in such a way that they often lose any specific meaning. For example, he refers to the Sufi movement as *heresia* (page 176). Leo does not aim for encyclopaedic completeness, a point he stresses in the context of his description of African animals. He only mentions those, which are

not known in Europe. Leo also distinguishes between places he has himself visited, places which he only saw as a passer-by and those of which he was told about by others.

The methodological approach of Leo Africanus becomes obvious from the way he constructs his text. Rauchenberger demonstrates this for *Terra de li Nigri*: An introduction into the region as a whole and a conclusion at the end encapsulates his accounts on the individual realms of this part of Africa. This becomes particularly clear in his chapters on *Cano*, *Borno* and *Nube* where Rauchenberger identifies the following sequential structure (page 176):

1. the geographical situation of the realm
2. its organisation and products
3. the capital
4. the inhabitants
5. dynasty, governmental system, finances and troops

It can be speculated whether these are the things his original patrons expected him to find. European travellers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century kept similar lists (page 177, see also footnote 798).

Rauchenberger discusses unresolved research issues (pages 177-192) coming from the *Descrittione* and which would occupy explorers for centuries to come. One major issue is the mention of the enormous wealth of gold of the kings of *Tombutto* and *Borno* (in the case of Timbuktu, gold bars of up to 1300 pounds weight are mentioned). This was later perceived as an exaggeration, which subsequently had a very negative effect on Leo Africanus' reputation as a historian<sup>20</sup>. However, the *Cosmographia* seems to rectify this. Leo describes in the original manuscript gold bars of only 50 and of 300 pounds [1 pound is either 12 or 16 ounces<sup>21</sup>, which is about 336 or 448 grams] in *Tombutto* and in *Borno* he only speaks of gold plated decorations (pages 177/78).

Apart from the gold, Leo's mistake about the direction of the river Niger remains. Leo believed that the Niger ran from east to west and claims that he knows that because he travelled the Niger. However, the Niger sometimes runs very slowly and also has currents which can run in both directions (page 179). It is possible that Leo was not really sure and later decided to accept el-Bekri's and Idrissi's view (page 180).

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<sup>20</sup> See Oliver – Cambridge History of Africa (1977:277).

<sup>21</sup> 'A measure of weight and mass derived from the ancient Roman libra (which is equal to 327.25 grams), but this ancient standard has been modified variously over the course of time, and in different countries. The pound consisted originally of 12 ounces, corresponding more or less to that of troy weight. This is still used by goldsmiths and jewellers in stating the weight of gold, silver, and precious stones; but as early as the thirteenth or fourteenth century a pound of sixteen ounces was used for more bulky commodities.' Entitled: Measurement in the Middle Ages, [www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/history/measure.html](http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/history/measure.html).

The *Cosmographia* contains many references to geographical distances and Rauchenberger examines what Leo Africanus might have meant by a mile (page 181). He discounts the possibility that Leo meant English miles (1.609 km), sea miles (1,852 km) or a *geographical mile* (7,4204 km). Rauchenberger assumes, instead, that Leo Africanus used the Roman mile, which is 1.5 km long and goes on to compile Leo's references to distances in a table. He concludes from his comparison that Leo might have travelled about 50 km per day, an average of 25 miles in Leo's terms (page 182).

From the 22 references to distances in the *Cosmographia*, 14 have a clear start and endpoint which can be geographically identified and measured. Of these 14 distances about 65% are very close to reality – on the assumption that Leo used Roman miles – and for 5 of these the distances are wrong. The book has a table of these distances (page 183) from which we can conclude that Leo Africanus' geographical distances are more accurate than those of his fellow countryman, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, and that only the distances of the European explorers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century reach a higher accuracy (page 184).

Rauchenberger (pages 184-192) goes on to discuss place names mentioned in the *Cosmographia*, like *Guangara*, *Gaogao*, 'Aidhab or *Zibid*, as well as *Jemiam*, *Godem* and other *mysterious names*.

For *Guangara*, he points out that the *Cosmographia* shows that Ramusio inserted in the *Descrittione* the sentence that 'porters could make the journey twice per day with gold' which created the impression that *Guangara* was very close to *Wangara*. In the *Cosmographia* Leo Africanus writes that slaves took this route repeatedly but he never said that they did this within a day. This removes the impression that *Guangara* and *Wangara* were very close to each other (page 186).

With regard to *Gaogao*, the *Descrittione* mentions *Gaogao* three times and *Gaoga* seven times whereas the *Cosmographia* only speaks of *Gaogao*. Unfortunately, the literature has more or less settled for the name *Gaoga*, which makes it even more difficult to geographically locate and the problem remains. Most scholars seem to agree today that *Gaogao* existed around Lake Fitri in Chad (page 187).

In the context of *Nube*, the *Descrittione* speaks of a town *Zibid*, which is said to have disappeared 100 years before Leo Africanus came to *Nube*. *Zibid* is actually a town in Yemen and its connection with *Nube* is a mistake by Ramusio. Leo Africanus never speaks in context of *Nube* only of *Zibid* but only of 'Aidab which is Italian for *Hideb*. The confusion was reinforced by Garcin<sup>22</sup> who

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<sup>22</sup> Garcin, Jean-Claude. 1972. Jean Léon l'Africain et 'Aydhab., in *Annales Islamologiques*, vol 11, Kairo, p. 208.

accused Leo of indecency because he based his judgement on Épaulard wrongly believing that he consulted the *Cosmographia* when he referred to *Zibid* as being in *Nube* (page 189).

Leo Africanus mentions that, in addition to the 15 realms between *Gualeta* and the Nile, he also wrote of 45 realms he never saw. Leo points out that they are south of those he visited and that these 45 realms traded with the 15 northern realms he himself visited. Of those 45 unvisited countries he only mentions 6 by name, which are *Bito*, *Jemian*, *Dauma*, *Medra* and *Gorhan* and adds that the other ones are remote and completely unknown to him. He explains that the lack of information comes from the remoteness of these unknown places and the strenuous journey required to get there, as well as with the strangeness of their language and religion. The Ramusio editions and the literature drawn from them (including Épaulard) never mention these *entirely unknown countries*. In addition, Ramusio changed the name *Jemiam* to *Temian*, which made it difficult to identify (page 189).

*Gorhan* is the only name which appears a second time in the *Cosmographia*, in fact, as a people who, like the *Seu* (Sao), lived in the area around Lake Chad. *Gorhan* is an Arabic word meaning *the mangy ones*, which is still used today as a derogatory term for the Tibbu, Teda and Daza. All other names (*Bito*, *Jemian*, *Dauma* and *Medra*) are only mentioned once in the *Cosmographia*. Rauchenberger (page 190) says that all these names can be correctly located.

For example, he discusses the *Seu* and claims that the name means ‘settlers’ (*Siedler*), a translation he derives from Lange<sup>23</sup> (1989:210). However, to my knowledge the word *Seu* or Sao/Saw/So is possibly better derived from the fact that the Sao were the builders of perimeter walls (*sawé* = wall in the Kotoko dialect of Gulfei; see Lebeuf<sup>24</sup> and Detourbet 1950:26) with which they encircled their towns.

Another name, which is of special interest for ethnographers and archaeologists concerned with the history of the Lake Chad region, is Leo Africanus’ mentioning of the name *Medra* and its translation as Mandara by many researchers (page 191). This view remains unchanged in the *Cosmographia*, where *Medra* is mentioned at the end (page 341) of the section where Leo gives a general introduction to *the division of the land of the blacks, kingdom by kingdom*<sup>25</sup>. Leo writes in Rauchenberger’s transcription: *In the south they border on many other kingdoms: Bito, Jemiam,*

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<sup>23</sup> Lange, Dierk. 1989. Préliminaires pour une histoire des Sao, in JAH, vol 30, Cambridge (p. 189-210).

<sup>24</sup> Lebeuf, Jean-Paul and A. Masson Detourbet. 1950. La civilisation du tchad. Avec une étude sur les bronzes sao par Raymond Lantier, Paris.

<sup>25</sup> ‘*Dè la Divisionè dè la Terra Negre/ sca Regno per Regno*’ = ‘Die Unterteilung des Landes der Schwarzen in einzelne Reiche’ (pages 336/37).

Dauma, Medra and Gorham. *They are developed and open for trading, wealthy and well governed by their rulers. As for the others they are worse than animals*<sup>26</sup>.

This shows that *Medra* is, in the eyes of Leo Africanus (who never visited *Medra* himself), more developed, civilised and open for trading, etc. whereas those further south are considered by him primitive, poor, uncivilised and so on. I agree with Rauchenberger (page 191) that *Medra* is the kingdom of Mandara, especially since we know that Mandara was known to Italian scholars of the time, Giovanni Lorenzo Anania (1582) who spelt it *Mādra* and to Fra Mauro (1459) as *Mandera*.

#### *Leo Africanus' description of the montagnards (Montanari) of Borno*

I would like to quote from a further passage of the *Cosmographia* (pages 308/9), especially the part where he speaks of the mountain tribes in the kingdom of *Borno*. Before I do that I want to briefly discuss the geographical framework of Leo's introduction. He begins his section on *Borno* by placing it to the east of *Guangara*, the previously described realm:

*Borno is a province, in the west bordering the previously described [realm] and stretches 500 miles eastwards. It is situated about 50 miles from the origin of the Niger. In the south it borders the desert of Seu and in the north the desert which leads to Barcha.*

That Leo describes *Guangara* before *Borno* is presumably a reflection of the fact that he travelled in an easterly direction. This fits in with the province of *Gaogao*, which he describes after *Borno* and where he names *Borno* as the previously discussed realm in the west. *Gaogao* is believed to have existed around Lake Fitri in Chad which is to the east of *Borno*. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Leo speaks of 500 miles (about 250 km) as the west-easterly extension of *Borno* but does not give a similar figure for its south-northerly extension.

What appears odd is that he then places *Borno* only 50 miles (25km) away from the origin of the river Niger<sup>27</sup> and that it, *Borno*, is bordered, in the south, by the desert<sup>28</sup> of *Seu* (*lo Deserto dè seu*). Rauchenberger (page 309, footnote 1433) points out that Leo presumably meant *Birni n'Gazargamu* (at the time the capital of *Borno*) which was not far from Lake Chad (origin of the Niger). I assume that Leo's statement *...in the south it [Borno] is bordering the desert of Seu...* must be related to Lake Chad (or the old capital of *Borno*) and not to *Borno* as a whole. *Seu* (Sao)

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<sup>26</sup> 'El qualè confina con quisti Regnj cio E/ da la banda de mezzo Giorno moltj altrj Regni in lo Regno dj Bito/ Jemiam [Ramusio read Temian (footnote 1521)]/ Dauma/ Medra/ Gorhan/ & signo/ rj ma lj altri sonno pegio chè lè Bestiè~' = 'Im Süden grenzen sie an viele andere Reiche: Bitto, Jemiam, Dauma, Medra und Gorhan. Sie sind für den Handel so gut wie erschlossen, sind wohlhabend und werden von ihren Herrschern gut regiert. In den anderen ist es schlimmer als bei den Tieren.' (pages 340/41).

<sup>27</sup> Leo Africanus believed that the Niger began at Lake Chad to which he referred as *uno grandissimo lago* (page 360).

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas David emailed in this context: '...the "desert of Seu" is interesting - Leo must have thought of desert as either uninhabited territory or territory that he found very strange rather than as a hot dry place.'



did indeed live south of Lake Chad.<sup>29</sup> Also Leo shares this view in his general introduction to Africa, where he writes that the *Seu* live around a great lake (pages 360/61).

Leo then continues as follows:

*The landscapes of this province are quite different. Some areas are mountainous while others consist of plains. In the plains there are big villages in which the more highly developed people live as well as the foreign, black and white merchants. The soils there are rich and heavy. In one of these large villages lives the king of Borno with his officials. In the mountains live tribes who raise goats and cattle. They plant millet and other, but unknown, cereals. They all go naked during the summertime and cover their private parts with small aprons of leather. During the wintertime they wear sheep hides and their beds are made of fur. Some of these montagnards [Leo speaks of Montanarj/Montanari; page 310] have no religion, neither Christian nor Jewish or Islamic. They live like animals without faith. They share their women, who work like men. They live in villages where they live together like families. These mountain people also fight with each other but they use only bows and wooden arrows, without iron, which they dip in poison. The author [Leo Africanus] says that he was told amazing things about them by a merchant who often met these people and who could understand their language. They do not give names to people but call them according to their appearance, for example something obvious about it or lacking. A tall person they call Tall, a fat one Fat and so on.*

This is a back translation of the German translation of Rauchenberger (pages 309/10) from the *Cosmographia* (page 308), which may encourage the reader to refer to his transcription of the original. What is interesting is that Leo Africanus is correct as long as he speaks of things he has seen with his own eyes, for example, his description of the landscape existing of both mountains and plains. Considering the closeness of *Borno* to Lake Chad and *Seu*, we can be quite certain that he refers to the Mandara mountains. Although he only records from hearsay, he is also correct about the fact that the peoples of the mountains plant millet and other cereals (eleusine and maybe sorghum) and that they keep goats and cattle. Another truth is that they go naked (at least in the eyes of a Moslem).

Where things no longer meet ethnographic reality is shown in his description of their social structure and lifestyle. His comments about their religion are equally derogatory but presumably not unusual for an educated man and traveller of his time, and especially one writing for his Italian

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<sup>29</sup> Forkl, Herrman. 1983. Die Beziehungen der zentral-sudanischen Reiche Bornu, Mandara, und Bagirmi sowie der Kotoko-Staaten zu ihren südlichen Nachbarn unter Berücksichtigung des Sao-Problems. Münchener Ethnologische Schriften, vol 3, München: Minerva Publikation.

audience. Still today the montagnards of the Mandara mountains are seen as 'primitive' and 'uncivilised' by some of the urban inhabitants of the plains.

Rauchenberger recognises that he cannot provide ethnographic explanations for all of Leo's accounts and interpretations. He uses ethnographic literature where accessible but only detailed specialist knowledge can really further our understanding in this respect. This applies particularly to those societies Leo tends to categorise as peoples without faith.<sup>30</sup> Modern ethnography has let go of such views and uses terms like egalitarian or non-centralised societies instead.

This becomes obvious in relation to the account of the montagnards of *Borno* cited above. Although it is correct to interpret some of his accounts on marriage and sexual life as extremely derogatory we must be careful not to overlook the possibility of some being ethnographic fact. Some facts he knows from hearsay might be hidden behind his moralistic interpretations, while others might belong in a different ethnographic context. The latter is presumably the case where he speaks of examples of naming, *A tall person they call Tall, a fat one Fat and so on*, which is not known in the Mandara mountains but in the Muri Hills<sup>31</sup>, further south in north-eastern Nigeria.

Other elements of his account might be a misinterpretation as the result of a moral/cultural reaction from his side. Polyandry, the marriage of one woman to more than one man, existed in pre-colonial central Nigeria<sup>32</sup> and he might well have interpreted this in his own ethnocentric way and attributed it to the montagnards of *Borno* who only practice polygyny, the marriage of one man to more than one woman.

Another interesting question, which rises from this section, is his statement that *they use wooden arrows without iron*. I put Leo's statement to Scott MacEachern, archaeologist of the region, and he replied saying that it doesn't require much penetration to get poison into a wound, and thinks that it is likely that – if this part of Leo Africanus' description is accurate – using wooden arrows with poison might be quite an effective approach to saving metal<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Leo for example writes about the montagnards of *Borno*: ... *Montagnarj non tengono Fedè...* (page 310) = 'Montagnards have no faith', meaning religion (translation by Müller-Kosack).

<sup>31</sup> Kleinewillinghöfer, Ulrich. 1995. Don't use the name of my dead father. A reason for lexical change in some north-western Adamaoua languages (NE Nigeria). *Afrika und Übersee*, vol 78, p 125-136, Hamburg.

<sup>32</sup> Muller, Jean-Claude (ed). 1982. *Du bon usage du sexe et du mariage. Structure matrimonial du Haut Plateau Nigérian*. Paris/Québec : La Matin/Serge Fleury.

<sup>33</sup> Scott MacEachern pointed out to me that there is iron from sites just at the bottom of the mountains from well before this period and also later when Anania speaks of Mandara iron exports.

What is almost certain is that Leo Africanus mixed information from various regions and then applied it to many of his peoples without faith. The mixing of ethnographic information is something, known from other travellers of his time, for example, Marco Polo<sup>34</sup>.

Rauchenberger's edition gives us an opportunity to look at these issues without the filter of Ramusio. I have tried to do that in the context of the montagnards of the Mandara mountains, although *Borno* might not be such a good example since the inconsistencies between the *Cosmographia* and the *Descrittione* are less marked here than in other regions.

#### *Leo Africanus' concepts of civilita and bestialita*

Rauchenberger also deals with open questions rising from the *Descrittione* in relation to the peoples of black Africa (pages 199 – 234) and explores the *Cosmographia* for possible answers. After dealing with *Tombutto* and *Songai*, he explores the names of kings in Leo's original manuscript and what Leo had to say about the existence of coin (*Münzgeld*). He subsequently discusses civilisations in the Sudan by first concentrating on (1) *villages, cities and regions*, (2) *kings, urban citizens and states* (3) *long-distance trade*, and finally (4) *civilita and bestialita*.

Before I discuss Leo's concepts of *civilita* and *bestialita*, I would like to briefly explore Rauchenberger's analysis of the size of villages, since this is relevant to my previous citation on *large villages in Borno*. Leo Africanus records types of settlements and the various geographical spaces very thoroughly and clearly. Rauchenberger has analysed Leo's material (pages 211-214) and organised it in two tables. Leo apparently distinguishes between what he calls *casale*<sup>35</sup> or *villaggio*, which Rauchenberger translates as villages (*Dörfer*). In relation to the large villages in the plains of Borno (see above) Leo uses the expression *grandi caslj* and *Casali Grandj* (page 308) and not the expression *villaggio grande*. It seems that Leo is using both terms in an alternating manner and Rauchenberger (page 213) comes to the conclusion that a *casale grande* or *villaggio grande* in Leo's terms can have up to 6,000 households or 30,000 inhabitants. A *cipta grandissima* (large city = *Großstadt*) can consist of 10,000 households or 50,000 inhabitants, while, at the other end of the scale, a *casale piccolo* (small village = *kleines Dorf*) does not number more than 300 households or 1,500 inhabitants. This means that the *casale grande* or *villaggio/villaggio grande* comprises the widest range of a human settlement category, which is between about 2,000 and 30,000 inhabitants.

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<sup>34</sup> Roger Blench referred to this phenomenon as the 'Marco Polo syndrome' (oral communication).

<sup>35</sup> The Purves Italian Dictionary, 1956 (second impression), translates *casàle* as hamlet, group of houses. This translation implies that a *casale* is a smaller unit than a *villaggio* (village). However, it seems that Leo Africanus is using both terms in an alternating way.

With regard to the settlement units of the montagnards of *Borno*, Leo speaks of *casalè* (page 310), which is translated by Rauchenberger (page 311) as villages (*Dörfer*). Although Leo has never been in the mountains of *Borno* we can deduce that he thought of their settlements as hamlets and villages of a smaller size than those in the plains.

Rauchenberger devotes a separate section (pages 228-233) to Leo's view of *civilita and bestialita* where he intends to show that Leo Africanus uses the term *bestialita* in a different way to European authors of the same period. For example, Sebastian Münster<sup>36</sup> categorises sections of the African population as being part of the animal kingdom (page 229). Even Leo's way of setting the context, for example, in his sentence 'lived like animals' (*vivevano como bestie*; page 258), in the reference to the inhabitants of some oases of the Sahara, we see that he only uses the term animal-like as a metaphor for humans he considers as uncivilised.

Leo Africanus did not use the term *bestialita* in a racist way because he believed both white and black Africans to be descendants of Ham,<sup>37</sup> the son of Noah. Leo also didn't interpret his concepts of *bestialita* from an ethnic point of view. This can be concluded from Leo's description of how the *Bugiha* in *Nube* became extremely poor, turned into bandits and walked around naked (pages 326/27) after the Turks had destroyed their wealthy home town, *Hideb*<sup>38</sup>.

Rauchenberger (page 229) summarises Leo's view of the lifestyles of the 'savages', 'animal-like humans' or 'primitives' as follows:

- Without knowledge and incompetent – they are illiterate and have no skills in crafts.
- They are pagans, do not know the meaning of dogma (*doctrina = Lehre*), and know no authority of the State.
- Some are poor, mean, and inhospitable, others are robbers and murderers who lie in hiding to waylay merchants.
- They don't fight proper wars for which they don't have the right weapons. Their poisoning arrows are only good for hunting and ambush attacks.
- They never leave their places of origin and don't trade.
- Apart from raising goats and cattle they have sparse knowledge of agriculture.
- They go naked or cover themselves with animal skins and live in huts made of leaves.

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<sup>36</sup> Münster, Sebastian. *Kosmographie ...*, Basel, (edition from 1598, p. 1453).

<sup>37</sup> See section of the original manuscript on the origin of the Africans (pages 342/43). All black Africans descended from Kusch who was a son of Ham.

<sup>38</sup> According to Leo Africanus (pages 324/25) *Hideb* was a large port on the Red Sea (*Marè roscio*).

- They don't know the institution of marriage.

In his listing, Rauchenberger produces references to Leo's original manuscript and concludes that they are the opposite of urban civilisations in the Sudan. He points out that, with regard to black Africa, Leo's view of *bestialita* as the opposite of *civilita* is mainly to be found in his description of the montagnards of *Borno* and the peoples of *Gaogao*.

*Leo Africanus' view of the slave trade of Borno*

For Leo, as a Berber from North Africa, the long-distance trade had to serve, for its main purpose, the activities of the State (page 219). Main goods of exchange were humans and gold (as raw materials) against horses for breeding, weapons and textiles (as finished products). Horses and weapons helped to secure the power of the State and to produce raw materials (like the capture of slaves). Rauchenberger sees this kind of cycle emerging from the *Cosmographia*, especially for *Tombutto* and *Borno*, and argues that it ensured the continuity and development of the State. He argues that the maintenance of public order and the relationships with neighbours were secondary to this and adds that, according to Leo Africanus, the most important long-distance trading goods of *Borno* during his time were imported horses and exported slaves.

The following back translation is a continuation of the section already discussed earlier, where Leo Africanus introduced the main geographical features (plains and mountains) of *Borno* and the lives of the montagnards. It deals only with the plains and describes the trading conditions with the white merchants which were controlled by the king of *Borno*:

*The province of Borno is governed by a particularly powerful king, who originates from the peoples of Berdao<sup>39</sup> in Libia. He commands about 3,000 warriors on horses and an indefinite number of foot soldiers, as many as he likes because his whole people is liable to service. He takes them wherever he wants. Apart from demanding a tithe [Decima] from the fruit of their agricultural labour he asks no more from his people. He [the king] has no other income than what he gains from killing his enemies on the borders who are also black by origin and who live in the desert of Seu. They are without number and, in earlier times, tended to cross the desert by foot in order to inflict as much harm to the province of Borno as they could. Ever since there are kings who rule over Borno, they [the kings] allow merchants from Barbaria [Berber countries of north Africa] to bring horses and they exchange them for slaves. They give 10 to 20 slaves for each horse and also gold. However, the king delays the merchants. Only when he buys horses he begins to prepare an attack on the countries of his enemies and it takes two or three months*

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<sup>39</sup> The Berdao/Berdawa are, according to Rauchenberger (page 486), inhabitants of the Kufra basin (desert and oasis).

*before he returns. After his return, he sometimes brings a great number of slaves with him which is sufficient for the merchants, but sometimes it is not enough. In that case the merchants have to wait until the next year because the king cannot carry out more than one foray per year. This is the reason why the merchants have now almost completely stopped trading with his country. The result of this is that the king, who ruled during the time the author [Leo Africanus] was there, took the goods of the merchants and then covered their living expenses as long as they had to wait to be paid. The [general] view exists that the king has unlimited wealth because it can be seen at his court that the equipment of his horses, stirrups, spurs and the decorations of the bridle are made of gold. In his household are wooden bowls and pots plated with gold leaf. Also the chains for the dogs are made of fine gold. However, the king is reluctant to pay his debts with gold. Instead of compensating them with gold, he prefers to cover their cost of living for a whole year in order to pay them in slaves. This king has beneath him several other kings<sup>40</sup>. The whites [presumably Berber merchants] also refer to those countries dependent on him as Borno because they don't really know the area well enough to remember all the details. This also applies to the author [Leo Africanus] who only spent one month in this land.*

We can conclude that (in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century) slaves and horses were the main long-distance trading goods in *Borno*. It also seems that gold was not a good the king of *Borno* liked to use for payment. There is also hardly any mention of where the king of *Borno* went when he was away for many months capturing enough slaves to pay the white merchants (who were presumably Berber). We may infer that he also raided in the Mandara mountains since these, apart from the *Seu* (Sao), were the only uncivilised peoples he mentions in his account of the kingdom of *Borno*. Leo Africanus devoted a considerable amount of text to the montagnards of *Borno*. This is of particular significance since he discusses the situation of the merchants waiting to be paid in slaves in such great detail. Leo Africanus also tells us that he got most of his information on the lifestyle of the montagnards of *Borno* from one of the merchants.

Considering that the montagnards of the Mandara mountains have a history of slavery which goes back more than 500 years,<sup>41</sup> it is quite possible that Leo refers to them not only as an example of peoples without faith but also, indirectly, as a significant section of the population of *Borno* which was subjected to intense slave raiding. This is even more likely if we take into account that Qur'anic law does not usually allow the enslavement of Moslems, but only of non-believers. Moreover, the increase in population density of the northern Mandara mountains is attributed, by many scholars of

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<sup>40</sup> *Rè tenè sotto di sè parichij Regentj* (page 314). Rauchenberger (see footnote 1442) points out that Ramusio turned this into ...*molti regni di Negri & Bianchi* = many kingdoms of blacks and whites (translation by Müller-Kosack).

<sup>41</sup> Please see the Mandara Mountains Homepage [www.mandarar.info](http://www.mandarar.info) for further information and references.

today, to the intense enslavement of pagan groups, not only of the mountains but also from the plains. This is a process which began from about 1500 onwards. It might well have been that even during Leo's time the mountains served as a refuge for pagans from the plains in order to escape enslavement during the raids organised by the king of *Borno* his lieutenants, and tributary kings including perhaps the *Medra*.

### *Conclusion*

It is the main purpose of this book description to encourage international readership, especially so that ethnographers and archaeologists may make use of this important work in German. Rauchenberger has shown that the *Descrittione* and resulting editions and translations, which have dominated our view of Leo Africanus for almost 500 years, must be revised. As Rauchenberger writes in his summary and conclusion (pages 234-237), the handwritten manuscript of the *Cosmographia & Geographia dell'Affrica* gives a first clear and unfiltered view of Leo Africanus' work. Rauchenberger could also show that Leo himself used the name *Affricano* and that it was not a derogatory expression but a proud statement of his Berber origin.

With regard to his account on *Borno*, which was of particular interest to me as an ethnographer of the region, it can be summarised that Leo was very conscious about what he considered important to report. First of all, he chose to emphasise the mountains and the plains as being the main contrasting geographical features of the region. He also chose to give a description of the montagnards of *Borno* and we have good reason to believe that he was speaking about the inhabitants of the Mandara mountains of today. Leo Africanus was the first to actually use the word *montagnard* for these remote groups.

In relation to the myth of the wealth of gold of *Borno*, it could be clarified that it was his intention to show that such unlimited wealth did not exist in *Borno*. Leo Africanus shows that it was the slave trade and the interest in horses, which kept the mercantile economy of *Borno* going, at least in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. If we accept that the montagnards of *Borno* were those of the Mandara mountains of today we can infer that the mountains were already well populated during Leo's time. This indirectly confirms the theory that the population increase there goes back about 500 years and that the slave trade of *Borno* is one of its most important historical causes.

